

The Contemporary Identities of Art Museum Educators as Told through Their
Life Histories

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Abstract

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Over the past three decades, art museums have been undergoing massive changes as they attempt to become more public-oriented centers that develop deep connections with diverse audiences. This new focus means more responsibility for and expectations of museum educators. At the same time, there is often far too little recognition of the important work conducted by these professionals. Art museum educators come from widely varied backgrounds, since the qualifications for these positions are inconsistent. Furthermore, definitions of museum education vary among professionals and institutions. The result is the absence of a unified understanding of the role of museum educators and sometimes a lack of credibility with colleagues outside of their profession. In these circumstances, museum educators are dealing with a growing identity crisis. Little research into the identities of art museum educators has included their narratives. Examining art museum educators' identities through narrative inquiry can help them to become more effective instigators of positive change in their institutions. Furthermore, in researching museum educators' stories of lived experiences, we are afforded the opportunity to reveal and derive insight from narratives that are not typically heard.

This study provided a locus for five art museum educators to articulate their current beliefs, attitudes, and practices related to museum education and the origins of these perceptions through rich narrative explorations. By employing life history research as a methodological framework, this dissertation explored museum educators' personal

and professional experiences to develop a more holistic understanding of what it means to be a museum educator today. This methodology was also studied as a form of professional development. The rich stories revealed by these practitioners were examined individually and through a process of cross-case analysis. The insight developed will help art museum educators, their instructors, and their institutions better understand what is necessary to optimize these educators' potential to effectively reach out to diverse audiences in meaningful ways. This dissertation concludes with suggestions for pre-service education programs and in-service professional development endeavors.

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Chapter One

Introducing the Story

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. (Benjamin, 1969/1936, p. 87)

Storied Lives

Our lives are experienced and recalled through story and storytelling. In fact, stories “are what make our human condition” (Kearney, 2002, p. 3). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted, “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 2). We make meaning and construct our identities through living, recalling, and telling stories, as well as through listening to the stories of others. We all have vivid recollections of lived experiences that stay in our memories long after the events occurred. These are worth reflecting on and sharing. There is a reason why these narratives have stayed embedded in our minds—they are important. I often reflect on and share my earliest recallable experience with an art museum¹ educator:

I visited the National Gallery of Canada as part of a school trip, with my mother as one of the chaperones. I was ten years of age at the time and this was my first trip to Canada’s capital, Ottawa. The gallery seemed gigantic to me, with its beautiful cathedral-like glass ceilings. The warm sunlight was beating down on us as we entered the space. We were greeted by a kind young museum educator who pulled us into the world of art at this gallery through his stories. He invited us to enter another large space with immense white walls and glistening hardwood floors. An enormous artwork hung on one of the walls—blue, then red, then blue. He shared stories of the controversies surrounding the artwork, which had been purchased by the gallery that year for a whopping \$1.76 million. We were all in awe of this price tag for the painting, and I began to try to question why it was so valuable. I figured it had a lot to do with the size of the work. The educator explained how the artist, Barnett Newman, painstakingly worked to make the

¹ In this text, the term “museum” refers to art museums, art galleries, and artist-run centers.

painting look flawless. He then asked us to stare at the work for a while. As I glared at the work, my eyes crossed, the painting blurred, I refocused and started the process again. After a few times, the stripes began to appear to jump out at me. It was as if I could beckon the painting to dance for me and with me. I shared my experience with my mother, who was standing next to me. The educator invited us to share our experiences and then asked if the red dancing lines reminded us of fire, which they most certainly did. He shared the title with us, which was *The Voice of Fire*.² We all agreed that this was an appropriate name for the artwork.

When analyzing this narrative experience for an assignment in my first graduate-level course, it became apparent to me that this memory contains many insights into my own philosophy about art museum education. The museum educator in this story incorporated polemics, narrative, play, aesthetics, mystery, dialogue, and personal meaning-making into the experience. These strategies play a significant role in my vision for museum education and, subsequently, my practices as a museum educator, researcher, and visitor. The experience at the National Gallery of Canada contributed to my current beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Therefore, examining this life story provided me with invaluable insight into the origins of certain components of my philosophy for museum education and my identity as a museum educator. Patrick J. Lewis (2011) has elucidated the process, “When I recollect my experiences and share them through stories, I am eliciting my own potential for meaning making” (p. 505). Researching our stories is essentially an effort to research our identities. As Lewis noted, “Story is central to human understanding—it makes life livable, because without a story, there is no identity, no self, no other” (p. 505). Goodson and Gill (2011) contended that “identity and narrative are intrinsically connected” (p. 6). According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), “We tell stories about our life and our ‘self,’ or rather our ‘selves,’ as a sort of reflective interpretive

² This work by Barnett Newman was created in 1967.

device, with a view to understanding who and what we are and the things that happened to us” (p. 41). Narrative can play a powerful, and I would contend, a necessary role in identity research.

I began researching the current realities of the museum education world in my master’s-level work, during which I realized the great need for research into the identities of museum educators through narrative methodologies. My master’s thesis examined the development, implementation, and evaluation of a community outreach program at an artist-run center and gallery space. The program aimed to reach out to diverse audiences who have little to no experience with art museums—a common goal for many of today’s museums. As the art museum educator and researcher in this project, it became clear to me that museum educators’ responsibilities are mounting, roles are changing, and infrastructures are often insufficient to support them at this time of change. It also became very clear to me that there are often misunderstandings regarding what museum educators’ roles are or should be. I asked myself, who are these museum professionals and what do they need to help them to fulfill their goals to make museums become more socially engaged institutions that reach out to diverse audiences in meaningful ways?

As a response to this, I delved further into research on my identity as a museum educator during a graduate course that explored the connections between art and research (Reid, 2009). I employed narrative and artistic responses to investigate my identity as a museum educator. As a result of the insight that I was able to develop from exploring my past experiences in this research, I became interested in the unique stories of other museum educators. In a pilot project, I investigated the connections between a fellow museum educator’s past experiences and his then current beliefs and attitudes about

museum education. He too revealed rich, vivid narratives of experiences with art and art museums—as a creator of art, as a museum visitor, and as a museum professional.

Though very small in scope, these narrative inquiries showcased stories that were laden with insight into the current condition of museum education amidst the great developments that have been occurring in the field. Over the past three decades, museums have been undergoing massive changes as they attempt to move towards becoming more public-oriented centers that develop deep connections with diverse audiences. This new focus has placed more responsibility and expectations on museum educators (Chen Cooper, 2007; Ebitz, 2005; Munley & Roberts, 2006; Talboys, 2005). At the same time, there is often far too little recognition of the important work conducted by these educators (Munley & Roberts, 2006). Museum educators come from widely varied backgrounds, as there are very few university and college programs that specialize in museum education. The result is a lack of a unified understanding of the role of museum educators and sometimes a lack of credibility with colleagues outside of their profession. Amidst these circumstances, museum educators are dealing with a growing identity crisis (Nolan, 2009a). A number of researchers have expressed the need for research into the identities of museum professionals (Lemelin, 2002; Munley & Roberts, 2006; Nolan, 2009a; Reid, 2009; Spock, 2000a). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research into the identities of museum educators that includes their narratives, as most recent research in museum education has focused on visitor studies. Although studying visitors is important, we cannot forget about the stories of the educators themselves. Janet Alsup (2006) has elucidated the importance of examining the teachers' identities so they can optimize their teaching:

...teacher education—or the much more mechanized phrase “teacher training”—is usually focused on the future of students of the pre-service teacher, not on the development of the teacher him- or herself...However, this externally focused approach tends to assume that the teacher is already self-actualized, already emotionally and affectively prepared to assume the teacher identity, with few personal challenges left to face. I argue that this assumption is rarely accurate, and teacher educators and new teachers should be more selfish and take care of themselves first, in order to better take care of others later. (2006, pp. xiv-xv)

Examining museum educators’ identities can help them to become more effective educators and instigators of change in their institutions. Furthermore, in researching museum educators’ stories of lived experiences, we are afforded the opportunity to reveal and derive insight from narratives that are not typically heard—voices that are often pushed to the sidelines.

Beliefs and Methodology

At the core of this dissertation reside two central beliefs: that exploring our own and others’ narratives can help us understand ourselves and the communities within which we exist, and that amplifying and analyzing narratives often suppressed in traditional discourses is an important act for understanding. This dissertation applies these beliefs to museum educators’ realities. I have been drawn to life history research practices in this effort to come to a greater understanding of museum educators’ identities and to make their voices more audible in museum research. Goodson and Sikes (2001) asserted:

The fundamental reason why researchers choose to use a life history approach is because they believe that detailed, personal information about how people have perceived and experienced things that have happened in their lives will enable them to better understand whatever it is they are studying. (p. 91)

Life history research examines participants’ lived narratives through placing them in the broad, complex contexts within which they existed. By exploring a life within its context,

we can come to better understand a community and can effect positive change—the primary aims of life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Furthermore, this methodology naturally projects the voices of individuals that might otherwise have continued to go unheard (Munro, 1998). Goodson and Gill (2011) explained this: “Detailed studies of individuals’ lives also allow stories to function as political responses, broadcasting ‘voices’ that are excluded from or neglected within dominant political structures and processes” (p. 20). In this case, the muffled voices are those of museum educators.

In this dissertation project, I examined the life histories of four museum educators plus my own life history. Thus, I held the dual role of both participant and researcher. The histories of each of the museum educators were explored as they relate to their personal experiences as museum visitors and art creators as well as their professional experiences as museum educators. This was achieved over the course of two life history interviews between myself and each of the four museum educators participating in this research. These life history interviews took the form of focused conversations rather than formal, hierarchical interviews. As for the interviews that explored my own life history, I engaged a fellow art educator to guide the process.

In this life history research process, I encouraged the participants to reflect on the potential connections between their personal and professional histories as art museum participants and art museum educators. By offering a series of topics, I led them on a journey into their pasts so they could come to a better understanding of their identities as museum educators—their beliefs, attitudes, and practices, along with the origins of these

ways of thinking. Furthermore, I engaged in this process in a personal way, in that I reflected on my own experiences and wove my stories into the research.

Research Questions

This dissertation *is* a story and is *about* story. It *is* the story of a group of five museum educators' personal and professional identities. It is *about* the process of sharing and analyzing these stories. The stories of these educators were examined in a contextual, holistic manner, revealing their life histories as they pertain to their identities as professional museum educators. Research into the identities of museum educators can help institutions give this profession the respect and value that it has long deserved. Furthermore, such investigations can help us to identify the support needed for these educators to fulfill their important task of reaching out to and engaging diverse audiences in meaningful learning experiences in museums. It is time for the voices of museum educators to be heard through the power of their narratives.

With this in mind, the following questions guided this research:

1. What are the personal and professional identities of the selected museum educators, as expressed through their life histories?
2. What are the connections between their personal and professional identities and between the participating museum educators' life histories?
3. What insight do their stories provide for the improvement of the education and professional development of museum educators?
4. How is this process of life history research applicable to the education and professional development of museum educators?
5. How can life history research strengthen the voices of museum educators in their institutions and in society in general?

In exploring these questions, this thesis will examine five museum educators' personal and professional identities through their life histories, develop links between all five of their histories, and explore the implications of the knowledge garnered for the education and professional development of museum educators.

Educational Aims and Significance

Lemelin contended that “through the years, the role of the museum educator has been discussed, debated, sometimes defined, but rarely has it been investigated” (2002, p. 3). There is great variance in the roles of museum educators and the power they hold in each museum, and these roles are changing before our eyes. Additionally, as Lemelin pointed out, there are few university programs specializing in museum education, leading to wide differences in educators’ pre-service education, and thus inconsistent points of departure. Museum educators, their colleagues, and society in generally are often uncertain about what museum educators do and who they are. This lack of a strong voice often relegates them to the sidelines of their institutions.

Museum educators are often almost invisible in museum organizational charts leaving them to lag behind in terms of improving practice and leaving them either frustrated and/or aspiring for a more prestigious career in the museum. (Lemelin, 2002, p. 2)

Furthermore, as Lemelin noted, museum educators often do not have a “forum and/or rich discourse to articulate what they do” (p. 3). There is little research into the experiences of museum educators from their perspectives. Lemelin’s (2002) dissertation was a participatory action research project that explored the practices of a group of museum educators. She asked them to reflect on their own practices throughout the research process. Castle (2001) documented and analyzed teaching in the museum from the perspective of museum teachers. Such studies give insights into some of the professional realities facing museum educators.

However, a holistic examination of museum educators’ identities through their professional *and* personal narratives has not yet been undertaken. For the first time, this dissertation work applies life history research practices that are currently being used in

other education-related fields to museum education. Life history research offers a means to explore museum educators' pasts by placing their personal and professional narratives in their respective contexts; thus, it offers a way for museum educators' voices to be amplified in the museum world and in society in general. Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted that life history research "demands holism" (p. 10), which, they argue, is appropriate for educational studies, as the private and public realities of teachers and students cannot be separated in teaching and learning.

This study provides a locus for a group of museum educators to articulate their current beliefs, attitudes, and practices and the origins of these sentiments through rich narrative explorations. I believe that exploring the perceptions and personal and professional experiences of individual museum educators will assist my participants and other individuals within and outside of the field to come to a more holistic understanding of what it means to be in a museum educator today, particularly in light of the institutional demands that museums are placing on these professionals. The stories may resonate with other educators' experiences and/or prompt them to investigate their own identities through life history inquiry. Furthermore, this insight will help museum educators, their instructors, and their institutions better understand what is necessary to optimize museum educators' potential to effectively reach out to diverse audiences in meaningful ways. This knowledge will generate suggestions for pre-service education programs and in-service professional development endeavors.

Structure

This dissertation unfolds as a story. Chapter Two sets the scene, outlining the literature and theories that have influenced the directions taken in this study. Chapter

Three offers the underlying plot, examining the methodologies employed. Chapters Four through Eight present each of the characters in this story—the participants. The ninth chapter offers the climax, where the stories of each of the participants come together through a cross-case analysis, revealing insight into the art museum education profession. Finally, Chapter Ten is the ending (and beginning), which highlights the insights revealed by the participants' stories and suggests changes to pre-service education and in-service professional development for museum educators and directions for future research.

Chapter Two

Setting the Scene: Literature Review

To be human is to experience “the relational” no matter how it is defined, and, at the same time, to be shaped by the “institutional,” the structural expressions of community and society. To be human is to be molded by context. (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 22)

This chapter sets the scene for this dissertation by presenting the research paradigm that I have worked within and the histories, theories, and projects that have influenced and guided me in developing and executing this dissertation—its context. The discussion of my research paradigm explores postmodernist and poststructural ideologies and how these support narrative explorations of identity. Furthermore, the origins of my connections to these principles are examined. Literature that supports these notions and lays the groundwork for this dissertation is then presented. This literature review covers a brief history of museum education; prominent theories in museum education; an examination of the recent changes to the field; contemporary conceptions of identity; identity research relating to museum professionals; the turn to holistic practices in research into teachers; and related projects.

Research Paradigm

My mother graduated from the Ontario College of Art (OCA)³ and was a working artist in my early years. In some way, I felt that I too was an artist as a young child, simply because my mom was. I recall my mother jokingly saying that, since she was pregnant with me when she graduated from OCA, I had also graduated from the art college. Because of this familial connection to art, I felt that I belonged in art spaces—

³ The Ontario College of Art is now the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU).

they felt like home to me. I loved meandering around in-progress artworks and staring at the special lighting in art studios. The high ceilings and precious, beautiful artworks in museums mesmerized me. The social aspect of visiting art museums and other art spaces with my mother was special to me. It was a time for me to see what my mother loved to do and to understand more about her work, which I found so intriguing. I truly felt that I was meant to be in these spaces, that it was natural for me to be around art.

Art continued to be important in my life throughout my high school years. My art teachers and fellow students praised me for my artistic abilities, particularly in drawing and painting. As a biracial individual, it was natural that I began to question and explore racial identity and its social implications. My artwork reflected this, dealing with race issues, humanitarian efforts, and personal history in my subject matter. Art became a way for me to express myself, to question, to experiment, and to thrive. At the same time, I was working hard and succeeding in science- and math-related subjects. Many of my teachers were pushing me to consider working towards becoming a medical doctor, while others suggested that I should focus on art.

In the end, I chose science. I was intrigued by health sciences and was mesmerized by the glamour, money, and value afforded to doctors. I recall watching *ER* religiously as I worked on my math homework. Extended family members began to tell others that I was going to be the painting doctor—someone who could balance both worlds effortlessly. As I entered my first year in the life sciences program at the University of Toronto, my perspective quickly changed. I was overwhelmed by the vast sea of students in my classes. I felt alone and it seemed as though a large part of me was missing.

Luckily, at the same time, I was taking an elective course in the Visual Studies program in the department of Fine Arts, called *Visual Culture*. It was in this class that I was first introduced to postmodern thought. Throughout the semester, Professor George Hawken guided us through an exploration of current postmodern ideologies and how they apply to the art world. I was immediately drawn to the inclusive and dialogic nature of postmodern perspectives. The rejection of objective truth and grand cultural narratives left room for my unique perspectives and narratives, and blurred boundaries. At the time that I found this ideology, I was standing on the edge of many boundaries, between art and science, between child and adult, between black and white.

As a class, we visited museums to experience postmodern art in person. While visiting the Cindy Sherman photography exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), I recall being struck by the beauty, the grotesquerie, the humor, and the ambiguity of her work. Her explorations of identity and power relations were touching to me, especially during my time of great questioning in my first year of university. As Gilman and Sundell (2010) noted, Sherman's work is an example of postmodern art, as she challenges the "existence of singular, irrevocable truths" (p. 8) and asserts the "constructed nature of the self" (p. 8). In visiting the AGO in this context, I felt as though I was being welcomed home to the museum world—a world filled with questions, blurry borders, and multiple narratives that I was asked to participate in by layering my stories, my experiences. This artwork, the Visual Studies class context, and the museum environment pulled me into the world of postmodern thought in a deeply personal way. This experience with Professor Hawken, the *Visual Culture* students, and the work of Cindy Sherman at the AGO was important to my development of epistemological and ontological views. In

postmodern thought, I had found a theory that expressed my approaches to understanding and interacting. Once again, the feelings associated with finding a home surfaced.

It was therefore only natural for me to develop this dissertation through a postmodern lens. In this project, modernist beliefs such as universal truths, grand narratives, and subsequent upholding of rationality and objectivity are questioned. Within the postmodern perspective, as Tarnas (1991) has pointed out,

There is an appreciation of the plasticity and constant change of reality and knowledge, a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles, and a conviction that no single a priori thought system should govern belief or investigation. (p. 395)

This dissertation employs qualitative research practices, which emphasize this postmodern perception of knowledge as being malleable, context-driven, based upon experience, and essentially individual. Qualitative research focuses on exploring data that is rich in description and not easily examined using statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 2). In this way, qualitative research practices explore and create a platform for expressing the intricate experiences of individuals and groups.

In the postmodern climate, qualitative research has become increasingly accepted, and in certain circles it has been championed over traditional quantitative research, especially in the world of educational research. It has become apparent that teaching and learning are highly involved practices that incorporate a myriad of circumstances and past experiences that cannot be reduced to statistical information if one is aiming to shed light on the realities of these important pursuits. In 1982, Bogdan and Biklen asserted:

Educational research is changing. A field once dominated by measurement, operationalized definitions, variables, and empirical fact has had to make room for a research approach gaining in popularity, one that emphasizes inductive analysis, description, and the study of perceptions. (p. xiii)

This reality has been seen in a wide variety of areas in the field of educational research. I have particularly been drawn to the work of educational researchers who have used qualitative research methodologies in teacher identity explorations (Alsup, 2006; Ball & Goodson, 1985; Beynon, 1985; Britzman, 1999; Danielewicz, 2001; Etheridge, 2004; Goodson, 1981, 1992, 2000; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Ovens, 2009; Prescesky, 1997; Szabad-Smyth, 2002, 2005; Tschida, 2009). These researchers, and others like them, have argued for a personalized look at teachers' identities, in which their unique stories are shared. Thus, with this type of research, the idiosyncratic and complex nature of teacher identities is exposed, revealing multiple perspectives, echoing postmodernism's effort to dispel the myth of the metanarrative (Tarnas, 1991).

The world of museum education has recently seen a surge of interest in postmodern practices in the realm of visitor engagement, art response, and exhibit display, where multiple ways of knowing are acknowledged and valued; where the role of historical, social, political, and cultural contexts is explored; and where visitors are engaged in holistic ways (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). This shift has paralleled a similar shift in the curatorial world, as art historical practices have begun to immerse themselves in postmodern approaches—reexamining the grand narratives that have risen in the field, along with the exclusive practices and decontextualized approaches that thrived in the modernist period (Mayer, 2007). My philosophy of art museum education is in line with such postmodern approaches. While postmodern sensibilities are showing up more and more in the theories and practices associated with art museum education, little research has yet explored the identity of the museum educator through a postmodern lens by using

qualitative research practices. It is my contention that museum educator research would also benefit from qualitative explorations into museum educators' identities, thereby valuing the complexity of the profession.

I strongly believe that identity research can be conducted through a postmodern lens by utilizing contextualized narrative-based practices such as life history research. Narrative research practices are founded upon postmodern notions, in that individual ways of knowing are exposed, contextual understandings of participants' lives are presented, personal anecdotes are championed over master narratives, and power systems in research processes are questioned. I am certainly not alone in my assertion that contextualized narrative research is a postmodern approach. Plummer (2001) has noted that the current "interest in 'stories' and 'narratives' is often linked to the so-called postmodern turn" (p. 12). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) claimed that the postmodern period was partly defined by "the narrative turn, a concern for storytelling" (p. 3). Goodson and Sikes (2001) referred to life history work as moving "away from modernist master narratives" (p. 14), along with the idea of the static, essential self. Munro (1998) outlined a number of the postmodern ideologies that are encompassed in narrative research:

This work has been pivotal to the critique of unitary ways of knowing and has blurred traditional boundaries between fact and value, history and fiction and knower and known. By highlighting the storied nature of knowledge, narrative has been critical in problematizing modern forms of knowledge that seem natural but, in fact, are contingent on sociohistorical constructs of power. (p. 5)

Munro (1998) has emphasized the link between language contained in narratives and identity. She stated that "there is an intimate connection between the project of language and the project of selfhood" (p. 6). Likewise, Britzman (1999) has asserted that "the problem of identity is a problem of language" (p. 54). This claim is intimately

connected to poststructural orientations, which parallel many of the same ideologies inherent in postmodern thought, and have informed this dissertation work. Within poststructural theory, language is “the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*” (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). Weedon noted that our subjectivity is constantly changing due to economic, social, cultural, and political circumstances that surround us. Everyone makes meaning of experiences differently and we develop and express meaning through language. Poststructuralist perspectives on identity formation emphasize the importance of listening to others’ individual subjectivities—their stories—in order to better understand our own selves. We are continuously evolving, and our narratives—our language—express aspects of our identities at a given moment. By exploring individual subjectivities through narrative, we work toward the postmodern and poststructural goal of rejecting grand narratives and objective truths.

Personal stories are clearly important in postmodern and poststructural practices. Personal accounts provide insight into how individuals and groups make meaning in their particular circumstances. As Cole and Knowles (2001) have highlighted, “the general can best be understood through analysis of the particular” (p. 13). Recent visual arts practices have demonstrated an interest in using particular stories to reveal personal accounts of contemporary experiences. Storytelling has been gaining momentum in contemporary art since the mid-1990s (Demos, 2010). As Demos has pointed out,

The models of storytelling they [artists] employ are typically couched in subjective presentations, are experiential and memory-based, and involve various modalities of the sayable and visible that tend to reject history’s official, definitive, and objective character. (p. 85)

I have always been intrigued by and drawn towards contemporary artworks that express narratives—personal accounts of experiences. In viewing such works, I tend to feel as

though I have an opportunity to gain insight into the experiences of the artist and those involved in the stories he or she is expressing, which in turn propels me to reflect on my own experiences. The narrative-based works of Adrian Piper, Faith Ringgold, William Kentridge, Kara Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, Do-Ho Suh, and Janet Cardiff, amongst many others, have inspired me in the development of my own art and in my ontology. I recently viewed the *Storyteller* exhibit at the AGO, which dealt specifically with artworks that employ narrative as “a means of comprehending and conveying recent social and political events” (Gilman & Sundell, 2010, p. 7). The curators noted that the participating artists built upon postmodern thought by valuing the subjective nature of storytelling, shunning modernism’s quest for absolute truths. Viewing this exhibit at the very museum where I had first been introduced to postmodern art illuminated the strong connection between storytelling and postmodern thought in many contemporary artists’ work.

My doctoral research has been highly influenced by the above-mentioned theories, scholars, and artists, along with the personal experiences that I have outlined. These influences have led me to develop research that is strongly linked to postmodern, poststructuralist, and qualitative research ideologies, enabling me to move beyond traditional research practices and towards narrative, dialogic, creative, reflective, holistic, and context-based methods. It was my goal to analyze and sew together the stories of the participating museum educators in order to develop a new story—one that reveals these educators’ and my own subjective, layered, and experiential interpretations. Through storytelling, this dissertation provides a postmodern glimpse into the contemporary world of museum educators.

Review of Related Research

The following is a review of key research that has influenced my understanding of the conditions leading to the current realities of museum education and the future possibilities for education and professional development in this field. I review the historical underpinnings of museum education in order to demonstrate the trajectory that has brought the museum, and particularly museum education, to its current place within society. Historical surveys are explored, along with policy literature. An examination of influential literature on pedagogy in museums is examined, demonstrating the holistic, visitor-centered turn in museum education. The current state of the museum education profession is explored, highlighting the circumstances that have led to the unpredictable climate within which museum educators now exist. It is argued that museum educators need to examine their identities, especially in these circumstances. I explore definitions of identity that have developed out of contemporary identity formation research in the social sciences. There is little empirical research examining the identities of museum educators. I outline the few studies that focus on either the professional or the personal experiences of museum professionals. Since there are no existing studies specifically concerning the connections between the personal and professional lives of museum educators, I turn to education research studies that exemplify how such valuable connections are being made in other education milieus. Thus, in this chapter, I aim to guide the reader through the circumstances that have led museum educators to where they are today, through research that explores their identities, and through studies from the field of education that can offer insight into the potential for context-driven research in museum educator development.

A Brief History of Museum Education

The story of public museums begins in the late eighteenth century, when these institutions were first established with the intention of promoting national, social, and cultural values to the public. George E. Hein noted that museums developed “approximately parallel with the advent of the nation-state in response to recognition that the welfare of citizens was the responsibility of the government” (1998, p. 3). During this time, learning opportunities became more democratic, reaching a larger audience. Museums played a large role in this goal of publicly accessible education. Thus, education was at the center of museums’ existence at their inception. Originally, didactic labels, catalogues, and gallery teaching were prominent in museums, and the museum was championed as a place for self-learning and as an extension to the classroom (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994b).

Education continued to be the main function of museums in the nineteenth century (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991). Hein (1998) noted that at this time, “Museums were included among the agencies available to help people better themselves and to appreciate the value of modern life” (p. 4). Museums took a supportive, subservient role in relation to public schools in Britain and the United States. A criticism of the educational purpose of museums during the nineteenth century is that “museums were torn between their educational goals and a more elitist, exclusive tradition” (Hein, 1998, p. 6), as a result of “limited access and restrictive practices” (p. 6). Hein, however, argued that it is not necessarily fair to accuse nineteenth-century museums of being undemocratic, since standards of democracy at that time were not the same as in the late 1990s (or today, I would argue).

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a decrease in the direct pedagogical intention of the museum, stimulated by modernist notions that were becoming more prominent in many areas of Western society. At that time, curators successfully established museums as sanctuaries for valuable objects. Hooper-Greenhill (1991) noted that by this time, “A new generation of curators was less interested in the public use of museums, and more interested in the accumulation of collections” (p. 25). Thus, museum education played a subordinate role to curatorial endeavors, where educators were to communicate the truths, according to the art historical world, contained in the collections to passive audiences.

As the above discussion demonstrates, museums have gone through a number of transformations over the years, fueled by sociocultural and sociopolitical developments (Hein, 1998). For some museums and museum professionals, the museum collection still stands on its own as an educational resource that does not require mediation from museum staff. However, the importance placed on the specialized work done by museum education staff has received increased attention in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). Over the past thirty years, museum education departments have generally become increasingly present within the institution as museums are pressured to “justify their existence” (Hein, 1998, p. 3). Hooper-Greenhill, a highly respected museum education researcher from Leicester University, noted that “museums have been subject to innumerable calls to modernize as their purpose and performance have been scrutinized, analysed and critiqued” (2007, p. 1). Mayer (2007) argued that the postmodern era left the modernist museum under attack. She stated that “a biting critique of museums as socially irrelevant grew from the social and civil unrest of

the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 44). Such sociocultural and sociopolitical changes have placed greater emphasis on context, inclusion, and critical inquiry. Government funding agencies and private donors want to know who is benefiting from their investments. The emergence of new art histories has challenged traditional practices in museums, where multiple narratives are being promoted, as opposed to single-perspective, ultimate-truth notions. Newer conceptions of learning hold the visitor’s past experiences and knowledge in high esteem. There has been an increase in museum visitation by nontraditional publics, who have different expectations from traditional ones. In response to these circumstances, museum education has begun to take on a new, more prominent role (Ebitz, 2005; Hein, 1998; Willumson, 2007).

This emerging role became especially apparent in 1984, when the American Association of Museums (AAM) disseminated its report *Museums for a New Century Commission Report*, which championed education in the museum. The report states: “If collections are the heart of museums, what we have come to call education—the commitment to presenting objects and ideas in an informative and stimulating way—is the spirit” (p. 55). The report promotes learning as a goal for the museum as a whole.

The AAM’s 1992 report, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, was even more direct with its encouragement of education throughout the institution. This highly influential report emphasized the central role education should play in the museum and championed community service as a high priority (Hein, 1998). Although all ten of the report’s recommendations are of great importance to museum educators and their profession, its first recommendation could be the most crucial for both museum educators and the museum as a whole:

Assert that museums place education—in the broadest sense of the word—at the center of their public service role. Assure that the commitment to serve the public is clearly stated in every museum’s mission and central to every museum’s activities. (AAM, 1991, p. 7)

With this statement, it becomes apparent that the American Association of Museums was calling for museums to place education at the very center of their functions—for education to seep into every aspect of the museum’s workings. Naturally museum educators are experts in education and need to play a leading role in this effort.

Prominent Pedagogical Theories in Museum Education

Even though educators began taking more visible roles in the museum world in the 1980s, the museum education profession was criticized for lacking a solid grounding in theory (Dobbs & Eisner, 1987). In 1987, Stephen Dobbs and Elliot Eisner published their highly debated article titled “The uncertain profession: Educators in American art museums” in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. In this report, the authors revealed the results of a study they conducted with the Getty Center for Education in the Arts in 1986 to further understand the issues and needs of art museum education. They interviewed over twenty-four museum directors and education heads, focusing on their perceptions of museum education and the role of the museum educator. They noted that there seemed to be confusion about what exactly education in the museum setting meant and what role educators were to assume. Dobbs and Eisner asserted that one of the primary reasons for this lack of certainty and clarity in the profession was the fact that, at that time, “museum education lack(ed) a strong intellectual base and theoretical foundation” (p. 82). They pointed out the lack of star intellectuals in the field of museum education—“no Jansons, Gombrichs, or Panofskys in museum education as there are in art history” (p. 82) and no “Deweys, Goodlads or Bruners as there are in education” (p. 82). Museum educators

relied on external sources of knowledge—art history, educational psychology, communication theory—rather than drawing on theories within the profession, since the latter did not exist (Mayer, 2005). While some aspects of the observations expressed by Dobbs and Eisner in their 1987 report are still true within the world of museum education, there has been much progress in the theoretical foundations. As Mayer (2005) observed, “Where not too long ago little was known regarding how people learn in the museum, now multiple theories have emerged” (p. 13).

Much of the theoretical work that has surfaced since the mid-1980s in the world of museum education has focused on moving from a passive approach to pedagogy that focuses on art objects and related facts, towards a visitor-centered, holistic, active, and meaningful learning experience (Grinder & McCoy, 1985). This is reflective of the progressive pedagogical theories and practices that were emerging in education and art education around the same time.

John Falk and Lynn Dierking’s influential book, *The Museum Experience* (1992) provides a template for visitor-centered, holistic, context-driven approaches to the museum visit, which they refer to as the Contextual Model of Learning (CML). The central premise of this book is that the visitor’s museum experience is “directly affected by the interaction of the personal, social and physical contexts” (p. 133). With this, Falk and Dierking moved away from the earlier dualistic, individualistic, and object-centered approaches to museum visits. Instead, the visitor’s personal agenda, social interactions, physical pathways, and embodiment of the experience are central to the learning endeavor. After years of modernist approaches to museum experiences, where the visitor was viewed as a *tabula rasa* and scholarly elitism in the museum was the norm, this

holistic approach to learning in the museum offered a radically different experience that focused on the visitor. From Falk and Dierking's perspective, learning in the museum:

...is an active process of assimilating information within the three contexts, and it requires accommodating new information in mental structures that enable it to be used later. All information so accommodated bears the stamps of the unique personal, social and physical contexts. (p. 101)

In this approach, learning is at the center of all parts of the museum experience, is highly contextual, is unique to each individual, is layered with past experiences, and will influence future experiences.

George E. Hein shares these authors' desire for a profoundly different way of perceiving museum visitors, in which their past narratives are integral to the new learning experience. His 1998 book, *Learning in the Museum*, remains a highly regarded publication in the world of museum education and research. In this text, Hein introduced the concept of the "constructivist museum"—a museum that actively puts constructivist learning principles into practice. Mayer (2005) has asserted that Hein's book offers the "most thorough presentation of a constructivist theory for museums" (p. 14). Hein draws extensively upon early proponents of principles relating to constructivist learning approaches, including John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky. Within the constructivist theory of learning, knowledge is viewed as being actively constructed in the mind of the learner, whose past experiences are fundamental components of new learning experiences. Hein noted that within a constructivist museum:

...the pedagogic challenge is to find experiences that stimulate and challenge. Constructivists, with their concern with the schemas and ideas that are already in learners' minds, will be more likely to ask whether the environment is one with which the learner can make any connections. (p. 38)

Thus, in the constructivist museum, visitors are viewed as knowledgeable participants

who are placed at the center of the experience. The conclusions that visitors reach in a constructivist museum, just as in the above-mentioned context-driven or narrative-focused museums, “are *not* validated by whether or not they conform to some external standard of truth, but whether they ‘make sense’ within the constructed reality of the learner” (p. 34). Hein offered insight into how museums can develop constructivist exhibitions, which he noted would “be likely to present various perspectives, validate different ways of interpreting objects and refer to different points of view and different ‘truths’ about the material presented” (p. 35, 36). Thus, in Hein’s perspective, the visitor is no longer seen as a naive vessel, but is viewed as a powerful, valuable, knowledgeable, and active participant in the museum experience.

Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine have produced influential, readily implemented research and strategies for an approach to art viewing (Ebitz, 2008). This approach values the visitor in a similar way to Hein; visitors are encouraged to “draw upon, apply and reflect on what they already know” (Housen & Yenawine, 2001, p. 1) and to embark on a discovery process. Mayer (2007) has asserted that Housen and Yenawine’s approach is constructivist. These two researchers are the co-founding directors of Visual Understanding in Education (VUE), a nonprofit organization, founded in 1995, that aims to promote Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) across locations and demographics to encourage critical thinking skills, visual literacy, communication, and motivation for learning through art viewing (Housen & Yenawine, 2001; VTS, 2010). VTS grew out of Housen’s work on aesthetic development, which she has been researching since the 1970s (Housen, 2007). She has argued that viewers “understand works of art in predictable patterns” (p. 172). This pattern is a series of stages that

demonstrate increasing skills in creative and critical thinking. These stages have been termed the *accountive*, *constructive*, *classifying*, *perceptive*, and *re-creative* stages. Housen and Yenawine's VTS is a series of "educational practices that help learners move to new levels of aesthetic experience" (Housen, 2007, p. 172). These practices are discussion-based and focus on the visitor's opinions, thoughts, interpretations and the development of multiple meanings in a group setting (Housen & Yenawine, 2001). With VTS, as Housen has stressed, "the learner must discover his meaning on his own" (Housen, 2007, p. 178), as teachers guide students to continuously delve deeper. VTS leads visitors towards "intricately combining the personal and the universal" (p. 175) in the final, *re-creative* stage.

In her 1997 text *From Knowledge to Narrative*, Lisa Roberts revealed that she too encourages visitors to combine their personal narratives with the more universal narratives presented by the museum. She perceives visitors as continuously drawing upon past narratives and constructing new ones during museum experiences. She believes that museums' narratives have had far too much power in museum education, where historical information has been served to the visitor. In this publication, Roberts called for a new orientation towards education in the museum, where more attention would be paid to "the development of goals that inspire visitors to discover and construct their own narratives" (p. 142), which links to Falk and Dierking's free-choice learning advocacy. Roberts noted that epistemological viewpoints are shifting within the museum, "as a single, curator-scientist-driven version of the world makes room for multiple, visitor-driven versions" (p. 134). In this effort, Roberts suggests that museums aim to include the social and historical contexts of art objects, provide a number of cultural perspectives, be

transparent regarding the construction of the museum's narrative, present the museum's narrative in a way that leaves room for "argument, complexity or multiple perspectives" (p. 145), and develop activities that ignite the active construction of personal narratives.

Since the publication of Roberts' influential book, a number of researchers and practitioners have advocated for a narrative-based approach to museum education (Ciasnocha, 2006; Garoian, 2001; Glover Frykman, 2009; Reese, 2003; Vallance, 2004). Garoian (2001) and Reese (2003) call for a museum that includes, values, and even requires the visitor's narrative in the museum experience. They envision museums becoming performative sites, where "a critical dialogue" (Garoian, 2001, p. 235) continuously develops between the visitors and the museum. Garoian noted that "Museums write and perform historical scripts through their collections and exhibitions" (p. 236) and that we need to challenge this by encouraging our visitors to dialogue with museum artifacts. He asserted that this dialogue requires the visitor's narrative. Garoian and Reese proposed that visitors engage in a dialogue between their narratives and those of the museum by using five strategies: perception, autobiography, museum culture, interdisciplinarity, and the institution. Reese asserted that "By using these five strategies, it is possible for the museum to transform its dominant socially and historically constructed pedagogy into interactive and critical narratives" (2003, p. 36). In Reese and Garoian's approach, visitors' private memories and experiences are invited to engage in a dynamic conversation with the museum's public narratives, which I believe is a central goal for all of the above-mentioned authors.

The Current State of Museum Education

The aforementioned authors, like many of today's museum educators and museum education researchers, envision a museum that overcomes modernist barriers by encouraging encounters that value the experiences of the visitor, are holistically oriented, are context-driven, and acknowledge and value the multiple narratives that visitors bring to and create within museums. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has similar beliefs, and has coined the term *post-museum* to define her vision for today's museum. In her most recent anthology *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, Hooper-Greenhill defines the post-museum as one that responds to our "present period of 'late,' 'high,' 'liquid,' or 'post' modernity" (2007, p. 1). Hooper-Greenhill views post-museums as attempting to find ways to meaningfully connect to their publics. Such museums have thus begun to make education a priority within their institutions, and museum education departments are championed in this effort. This is because museum educators "work to create relationships between the museum and its public" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a, p. 230). As the majority of museums move towards maximizing their potential by promoting their educational purposes, actions, and specialized programs, museum educators are being asked to meet substantial goals. Today's museum educators are challenged to acknowledge traditional notions of museums while incorporating the ideology inherent in the so-called "post-museum." As these positions emerge as full-fledged professions, many museum educators are required to fulfill long, often daunting, lists of expectations that are frequently at odds with each other. Munley and Roberts (2006) asserted:

...museum educators are called on to produce programs, of almost any genre, that draw large audiences; generate earned income; and stay away from controversy

that could damage attendance or jeopardize relations with powerful donors. (p. 29)

Chen Cooper (2007) noted that, under these circumstances, many art museum educators use the term “burnout” to describe their sentiments.

While these educators are being requested to accomplish lists of crucial tasks, it is still not uncommon for other museum professionals to feel that museum education is more dispensable than other positions. In 1987, Eisner and Dobbs’ study revealed the attitudes and knowledge towards museum education expressed by a number of museum directors and curators. One experienced director in their study stated, “I honestly don’t know what museum education departments are supposed to do” (p. 79). Another expressed the belief that museum educators are technicians who merely take their lead from curators who “really know(s) how a work of art should be viewed and interpreted” (p. 79). Over two decades later, museum educators are receiving more support from other departments in their institutions. However, as Graeme Talboys has explained, museum education is still too often “regarded by other members of that community as being not quite a true museum job” (2005, p. 19). Lemelin noted that an important reason for this lack of definition and comprehension of the role of the museum educator is the substantial lack of university or college programs specializing in museum education. She asserted that this often “results in little credibility among other museum professionals, such as curators and museum directors, for their education colleagues” (2002, p. 2). Lemelin proclaimed that a lack of recognition from colleagues in other departments often means that museum educators are almost “invisible” within the museum structure, leading to frustration and potential career changes.

Furthermore, many museums are struggling to find ways to demonstrate their value to their private and public funders with tangible and worthy evidence (Munley & Roberts, 2006). Museums typically turn to business models and clear indicators of success to demonstrate their value: “Continual attendance growth, increased market reach, balanced budgets and new and better ways to increase earned income” (p. 34). Munley and Roberts noted that educational programs do not substantially increase attendance and do not produce a great deal of income when compared with gift shop sales, admission fees, and space rental. They asserted that the value of education in museums cannot be demonstrated through the use of a business template, and added: “Given the nature of their work and accomplishments, it has never been about the numbers for museum educators” (p. 35). Instead, learning, community service, and the ability to resonate with the public have been at the center of museum educators’ agendas. However, since museums tend to use such formulae, museum education, and thus museum educators, are still at risk of being marginalized within the institution.

Clearly, amidst the continuing metamorphosis of the museum, museum educators must live up to high expectations and the support systems are often too thin for success to be achieved. These realities become even more prominent during times of recession, such as we are experiencing today. Tina Nolan, an educator with an extensive background with museums and other cultural institutions and a researcher on educational leadership in institutions, was the guest editor for the summer 2009 issue of the *Journal of Museum Education*. This issue opened with her introductory article titled “The museum educator crisis”, which highlighted the struggles that many museum educators and their departments are currently facing. She noted that a recent Museum Research Associates

survey demonstrated that museum educators are the “largest segment of museum staff to lose their jobs in this current financial crisis” (Nolan, 2009a, p. 117). Furthermore, many of the museum educators who have retained their positions are experiencing cutbacks in funding for their programs—“the ones who have been left behind to do more with considerably less” (p. 120). I agree with Nolan’s assertion that “a growing identity crisis among museum educators lies at the heart of their current vulnerability” (p. 117). In the spring 2006 issue of the *Journal of Museum Education*, Munley and Roberts suggested that education has begun to flow into all areas of museums, and thus the responsibilities are being distributed across the entire museum. They also asserted that “many thoughtful museum educators are grappling with issues of role definition and identity” (p. 29), and asked: “What has become of the role of the museum educator?” (p. 30). Nolan took this question one step further when she asked: “What will it take to reposition museum educators from the margins of our institutions to the center?” (2009b, p. 172). She has stated that for this change to become a reality, “It will require a movement within the profession—thousands of people willing to invest time, energy and resources to carve out a new identity and raise the professional bar” (p. 172).

Developing a new, solid identity starts with understanding one’s current identity. The museum educator’s task in this climate is obviously challenging but can equally be rewarding. Understanding the contemporary identities of museum educators is an important step towards enabling success. There has been very little research done in this area, and the research that does exist tends to skim the surface, through statistics-based studies and minimal accounts from museum educators themselves. Current museum education literature clearly encourages educators to develop a holistic understanding of

their visitors' identities and to encourage these visitors to play out their narratives in the museum. Thus, it is appropriate to ask, where are museum educators' identities in museum and art education literature? How can museum educators understand their visitors holistically and encourage their narratives if they do not have a grasp on their own identities and those of their colleagues? How can museum educators' identities be effectively included in museum education research? This dissertation aims to assist in filling in this gap in the literature by providing a holistic, detailed, and narrative-based examination of the personal and professional identities of museum educators.

It is important to discuss contemporary conceptions of identity before examining how this complex concept pertains to museum educators. In the following section, I present some of the core ideas involved in contemporary understandings of identity that have influenced my own definition of the term.

Identity

It is natural for humans to reflect upon who we are, who we were, and who we might become. That is, it is natural for us to reflect upon our sense of self—our identities. Thus, we all have an understanding of what identity means to each of us. The concept has been explored in a number of contexts by a variety of research fields, including psychology, sociology, education, and anthropology (Falk, 2009; Tschida, 2009). Gee (2001) asserted that, in our rapidly changing and “interconnected global world” (p. 99), researchers in a variety of areas are turning to identity work as a useful tool for understanding society. Since it is used by so many people, across such a vast array of fields, there is no one simple, agreed-upon definition of the term (Falk, 2009). Thus, as Falk (2009) has noted, the deeper one delves into discussions of identity, the more

complicated the construct becomes. The following discussion certainly does not cover the complex realities of contemporary identity research exhaustively; rather, it touches upon a number of scholars whose work has assisted me in conceptualizing my own definition of identity used in this dissertation.

Gee (2001) called for a move beyond strictly relying upon the traditional, static, and generalized use of identity that simply categorizes people, often by “race, class and gender” (p. 99). Thus, like many identity researchers, he pled for a move beyond the modernist notion of a “singular, knowable, essential self” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Like Gee, Wenger (1998), who discussed identity extensively from a social perspective in his book *Communities of Practice*, cautioned against generalized categorizations as a basis for identity labeling. These community memberships are important to identity formation, but one’s identity is not solely defined by a single context-independent category. Wenger emphasized that we need social interaction through communities to build identity, but membership in a particular community does not determine who we are. Wenger noted that “generalizations and stereotypes miss the lived complexity of identity” (1998, p. 146). Sole reliance on the assigned role that one plays in a single community does not holistically and contextually explore an individual’s identities. As Falk (2009) put it,

To really understand people and their actions, we need to understand the characteristics and motivations that matter in a particular time, place, and circumstance, otherwise we create stereotypes and cartoon versions of reality. (p. 75)

Falk has referred to the larger, more static groupings of identities as the “strongly-wired, deeply-held identities” (p. 73) or “big ‘I’ identities” (p. 73). Falk contended that these big “I” identities are important, but they are only a small segment of what drives our day-to-day thoughts and actions. He identified “little ‘i’ identities” (p. 73) as the ones that

“respond to the needs and realities of the specific moment and situation” (p. 73). These context-dependent identities are often just as important or even more vital to our sense of self than the big “I” identities.

Gee (2001) also views identity as a complex concept that is context-driven. He stated:

The “kind of person” one is recognized as “being”, at any given time and place can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable. (p. 99)

Wenger’s (1998) conception of identity is also fluid and malleable. He has referred to identity as a “negotiated experience,” in that “We define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves” (p. 149). In other words, our definitions of our own selfhood are continuously evolving through a process of negotiation of the meanings of our participation in experiences, which are reliant upon complex relationships between the individual and the social. Britzman (1999) noted how this social component of identity differentiates it from role: “...whereas role can be assigned, the taking up of an identity is a constant and tricky social negotiation” (p. 54). Wenger emphasized: “An identity, then, is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other” (p. 151). He noted that identity is also largely determined by what we do not participate in—what we are not. Wenger refers to nonparticipation as being just as important in identity formation as participation.

Britzman (1999) also refers to identity as a concept that is dependent upon constantly shifting social constructions—identification with or divergence from some other. She has discussed identity from a poststructuralist perspective. The notion that an

authentic core defines our identities is being challenged by a number of poststructuralist theorists (Alcoff, 1988; Britzman, 1999; hooks, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Poststructuralist thinkers suggest that social and historical context is essential in understanding identity (Britzman, 1999). In this sense, components of our identities are constructed and influenced by our environment—the social discourses connected to the identity markers that we use to describe ourselves. The meanings, practices, and historical systems associated with these identities are constantly shifting and colliding with each other. Britzman (1999) identified the central premises contained in poststructuralist notions of identity:

A poststructuralist approach to identity, then, is concerned with tracing identity as subjected to the constraints of social structure and to the practices of discourse. As discursive boundaries shift, so, too, do identities and the lived experiences that name them. (p. 57)

In relation to educators, she referred to two voices that constantly work with and against each other: the authoritative voice that defines the role of the teacher—what he or she is expected to do and be—and the internal voice that “speaks to one’s deep convictions and desires” (p. 63). Britzman’s conception of identity is thus malleable and essentially dialogic.

Bakhtin was influential in his dialogic, social approach to identity that requires constant renegotiation of the meanings contained in language. As McKnight has noted, from a Bakhtinian perspective, “selfhood becomes a social and dialogical activity immersed in language” (2004, p. 283). It is only through dialogue that words are afforded meaning. Kvale (1995) asserted that “the conversation becomes the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood” (p. 24). We are exposed to a multitude of voices that express differing meanings for words. We internalize these voices and

determine our own meanings and uses, which are used contextually. These internalized meanings make up who we are. As Hull and Zacher (2007) have put it, “Bakhtin viewed identity formation as a linguistic, ideological struggle to make others’ words one’s own” (p. 76). Bakhtin himself stated:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. (Bakhtin, 2006/1981, p. 293)

We borrow words, and that is what makes language social (Britzman, 1999). When we “revoice” the words that have been spoken by another, with our own developed meanings, we can direct our actions according to our own desires, values, and beliefs.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain’s (1998) view of identity is heavily reliant upon the individual and social realms. They were highly influenced by Bakhtin’s dialogic approach in their conception of identity, emphasizing that one’s identity is a product of the combination of both internal and external forces. They stated, “Identity is a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations” (p. 5). From their perspective, identities are constantly evolving through lived experience—affected by both internal and external worlds. In their view, we are affected by our culture, but we also engage with and respond to our culture. There is constant conversation between the personal and social worlds. As Holland et al. put it, “identities take us back and forth from intimate and public spaces” (p. 272). Danielewicz (2001) shares a similar view of the dynamic interconnectedness between the personal and public spaces involved in identity. She stated, “Identities then are the result of dynamic interplay between discursive processes

that are internal (to the individual) and external (involving everyone else)” (p. 11). In this way, identity is developed through a process of interaction (Goodson & Gill, 2011).

Many scholars consider narrative to be essential to this interplay between the internal and the external self. As such, there has been increasing interest in the role of narrative in identity development and expression in social science research (Goodson & Gill, 2011). Elliott (2005) noted that there has been

...a great deal of theoretical interest in the notion of the narrative construction of identity, a move away from the modernist understanding of “self” as an enduring, immutable essence, and a growing interest in the way that identity is shaped in interaction through discourse. (p. 36)

Goodson and Gill (2011) view identity as intimately connected to lived narratives: “Our definition of the concept positions our view of identity primarily within life narratives, in other words, in narrative identity” (p. 7). Petra Munro (1998) believes that identity and narrative are intimately connected. She has even claimed that: “There is no identity outside narrative” (p. 6). Munro contended that, in order for events and selves to exist, they must be infused with story elements. We make sense of events and ourselves by developing narratives. We share our identities by expressing these narratives.

Identity is clearly a complex notion, and its meaning varies from individual to individual. However, links can often be made between many of the contemporary conceptions of identity. The understandings presented by the authors discussed in this section have some essential similarities. All of these scholars would agree that identity is a fluid, malleable, and context-driven concept. From their perspectives, identity depends upon internal and social conditions—the combination of private and public spaces. Many of these authors note the importance of language in identity development. Finally, these scholars view identity as being developed and altered through lived experience—through

practice. It is with this understanding of identity that I approach the discussions of museum educator identity that will develop throughout this dissertation. The following section explores the literature that touches upon aspects of the professional and personal identities of museum educators and other museum professionals.

Personal and Professional Identities of Museum Professionals

There are few contemporary studies that directly focus on the professional identity of art museum educators. Many of these studies lean towards survey-based methodologies and historical explorations that provide a broad picture of the preparation and development of museum educators (Chen, 2004; Chen Cooper, 2007; Ebitz, 2005, 2007, 2008). These types of studies provide insight into the roles that museum educators play or have played in their education and careers, but do not really delve into the fluid, narrative, context-driven aspects of their identity development. Other studies have begun to explore the identity of museum professionals, including museum educators, by examining narratives relating to their profession (Dillenburg, 2005; Lemelin, 2002). Such studies provide some initial insight into the social formation of identity in museums.

Chen Cooper (née Chen) (2007) researched the desired qualifications of museum education professionals. By examining 47 postings for art museum educators in *Aviso*, an AAM publication, from April 2001 to September 2001, she noted that most museums were looking for candidates who had obtained an advanced degree or a master's degree, primarily in the area of art history. Ebitz (2005) also examined 109 *Aviso* job postings from January 2002 to December 2003, and noted a similar pattern. This prominence of art history in museum education postings is consistent with Dobbs and Eisner's (1987) research results from the mid-1980s. Chen Cooper and Ebitz both pointed out that

museums have started to recognize and value preparation outside of art history, such as museum education, museum studies, art education, and education. Ebitz (2005) also observed that practical experience in museum education or teaching is valued and can substitute for a degree in art or museum education.

Ebitz (2005) and Chen Cooper (2007) both noted that verbal and written communication skills were by far the most commonly required skills in the *Aviso* museum education job postings. Chen (2004) discovered that organizational skills, staff management, and collaboration were also highly valued. Computer literacy was commonly listed in the postings as well. It is interesting to note that knowledge of art history was not as prominent in the required skills, as observed in Ebitz's (2005) research, when a degree in this area is still the most common educational requirement in art museum education postings.

In 2004, Chen conducted a survey to examine the rewards and challenges related to the museum education profession according to 30 practitioners. She noted that most participants found their work enjoyable because of their high level of interaction with people (89.3%) and the chance to be surrounded by art (82.1%) (Chen-Cooper, 2007). They also expressed the satisfaction they get from knowing that they are benefiting communities (78.6%) and participating in creative tasks (57.1%). The challenges related to museum education expressed by the respondents included inadequate funding, time, and staff. They also described frustrations relating to a lack of communication and collaboration between colleagues. Many of the respondents said that they were "underappreciated by other divisions" (p. 71). A number of the participants expressed the stress associated with the public's "misconceptions of the functions of art museums and

audiences' expectations of art museum experiences" (p. 71).

While the above-mentioned studies, and others like them, are informative and valuable to art museum education research and practice, they focus on survey results rather than on the rich narratives associated with art museum educators' professional experiences. There are very few studies documenting museum educators' narratives relating to their professional experiences. As Nathalie Lemelin pointed out in her 2002 PhD dissertation, "the field of museum education will benefit from more studies conducted 'from the inside,' that is from the perspective of a practitioner who is part of a social structure" (p. 32). She noted that museum education is still typically defined by museum directors rather than by the educators themselves. The voices and detailed experiences of museum educators are not often prominent in institutional definitions of museum education or in the existing research literature. Lemelin's (2002) dissertation inquired into the role participatory action research, where the participants became co-researchers in the project, can play in the reflective professional development of museum educators. She was an intern at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MACM) during her data collection stage and immersed herself in the professional culture of this education department. She documented the processes that she, as participatory action researcher/intern, twelve educators, and one coordinator went through in collaboratively working towards an understanding of their professional practice. They began to understand their profession better through actively reflecting on their own professional practices in an action research setting. In conducting this research, many of the participants stated that they rarely have enough time to reflect on their practices and that the action research project made room for this valuable process, fostering professional

development. Lemelin reported that the educators expressed feelings of empowerment gained from the process, which stimulated recognition within their own department rather than seeking it from colleagues in other departments.

Dillenburg (2005), an exhibit developer at the Science Museum of Minnesota, produced a short article for the *Exhibitionist* journal, which looked at the narratives of fellow museum professionals' defining moments in their museum careers—moments that changed their understanding of museums or the museum profession. The stories shared included how these professionals came to their positions, early defining moments, the impact of their work on visitors, experiences dealing with controversy, acceptance of a promotion, interactions with objects, and decisions to leave a position, an institution, or the field. He aptly noted that museum professionals may relate to the experiences of others by reading these narratives, which is especially important at this time of change in the museum. Dillenburg stated: “It helps to know that we’re not alone, and it’s useful to gather whatever guidance we can as we navigate our own personal crossroads” (p. 43).

The above-mentioned studies provide valuable insight into the professional experiences of museum educators and other museum professionals, but do not focus substantially on the rich personal histories of the subjects of the studies. As outlined in the previous section, if we define identity as a complex, holistic, and reflexive concept, personal pasts are essential defining components of professional identity formation. There are only a very small number of studies that place museum professionals' narratives of their personal histories at the forefront, and none of them focus specifically on museum educators. This is an unfortunate reality, as museum educators could greatly benefit from revisiting their pivotal personal experiences with museum visits and from

listening to similar stories from fellow educators. Museums commonly provoke meaningful and even pivotal memories for visitors. Hooley McLaughlin (1998) asserted: “Museums are in the memory business... Memories are not only preserved in museums. They are also made” (p. 10). McLaughlin believes that one’s “self-identity can be defined as a result of a museum visit” (p. 10). In other words, museums are sites that can have an impact on us, leaving a lasting impression. At the very beginning of the first chapter of his seminal 1998 book, Hein noted that it is not uncommon for visitors to “describe epiphanies in recounting their own history with museums” (p. 2). He goes on to share some of his own vivid memories. He recalls:

I once spent an hour on a misty, raw November morning in a Native American bark-covered dwelling talking to a staff member at Plimoth Plantation while she tended a cooking pot over an open fire. After a few minutes, only our conversation, the smell of wood fire, the wooden seats and blankets inside the natural sounds of the brook and dripping water outside existed... I felt not only privileged, but overwhelmed at the opportunity given to me to enter, if only for a moment, a lost world. (p. 2)

This evocative account from a museum educator and researcher could provide valuable insight into his career path, professional motivations, attitudes, and beliefs. An alarmingly minute amount of attention has been paid to narratives from museum educators in museum education research.

I have been greatly influenced by the work of Michael Spock, former director of the Boston Children’s museum, in the development of this dissertation. Spock and his research team started to fill in the above-mentioned gap in the literature. They did this by conducting research into the identities and realities of a variety of museum professionals by examining their personal stories of museum experiences (Spock, 2000a). In taking this narrative approach, Spock offered a personal look at the identities of museum

professionals. As Jensen Leichter and Spock (1999) pointed out, up until their research, there had been no systematic attempt to bring together museum professionals' memorable museum moments, to look at them holistically, and to see what can be learned from these memories. In their study, Spock and his team asked seventy-five museum professionals, including some educators, attending the annual meetings of the Association of Youth Museums and the American Association of Museums in Philadelphia in 1995, to share their stories of pivotal learning experiences in museums. This process yielded approximately two hundred crucial learning stories captured on video. The narratives were analyzed for thematic and emotional content as well as narrative form. Spock found that vibrant memories surfaced along with strong emotions, indicating the lasting impact of personal museum experiences on the lives of the museum professionals interviewed. One can witness the emotional content by viewing the professional video that resulted from this study, *Philadelphia Stories: A Collection of Pivotal Museum Memories*, which features two dozen of the museum professionals interviewed (Spock, Paterson, McManus, & Bedford, 2000).

In an article in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Spock focused on six stories of childhood experiences that later influenced these participants' museum careers. These narratives revolved around "a collection, an object, an exhibit, a chain of related experiences and an extended program" (2000a, p. 21). Spock noted that all six of the chosen narrators for this study "wanted to testify that their childhood experiences led them eventually into museum careers" (p. 27). He also believed that it is likely that more of the participants would have traced the start of their careers back to early childhood museum experiences if the researchers had pushed for this connection.

By delving into past memories of personal museum experiences, Spock noted that the participants were able to “find clues about where their beliefs and values really lie” (2000a, p. 30) and where they stem from, enabling understanding and growth. He argued that museum professionals are focused on professional concerns when on the job, which often veer away from their inner missions for their work and why museums are important for them and for society in general. Spock maintained that inviting these professionals to tell stories of their own pivotal experiences in museums unearthed genuine, tactile memories that “reveal what we care about, what really matters” (2000b, p. 1). Thus, this research project became a form of professional development for the museum workers who participated in the study.

Furthermore, Spock argued that these stories can “ring true” for other museum professionals. He stated, “They have many of the same features as memories each of us carry about the seeds of our own museum careers” (2000a, p. 28). Spock and his fellow researchers showed the tapes to their colleagues, who found the narratives to be “fascinating, evocative, thought-provoking, and useful” (2000b, p. 2). In an article Spock published in *Exhibitionist*, which he titled “The stories we tell about meaning making,” he demonstrated how listening to the stories of fellow museum professionals can spark meaning and connection for practitioners. In this article, he highlighted more of the collected stories and pulled out “ideas about what it takes to make meaningful exhibits” (1999, p. 30). Throughout the text, Spock presented excerpts of the professionals’ pivotal experiences with museum exhibits. The author often layered his own narratives relating to the same exhibit or associated experiences and made connections between the narratives told by the participants. When reviewing Spock’s articles and the *Philadelphia*

Stories video, it became very apparent to me that, in examining the stories of others, I see parts of myself through them. I connected to their narratives about racial identity, the smells emanating from art studios, the thrill of being mesmerized by an art object, epiphany-like understandings, and exciting social experiences in the museum. Reflecting on these stories enabled rhizome-like connections to evolve effortlessly, ultimately inspiring me to expand upon what Spock had started by developing this dissertation project. In the closing moments of the *Philadelphia Stories* film, Spock implored museum professionals to tell their stories and to listen to the stories of colleagues, since these narratives tell us what is really important. This dissertation responds to his plea.

What is lacking from the above examinations of the professional and personal realities of museum professionals are investigations that explore the connections between these two intimately connected worlds, with a specific focus on museum educators. In these highly challenging, yet potentially rewarding times for museum educators, there is a need to explore their personal and professional histories—how do their past personal histories affect their current, developing professional stories? What are their current beliefs and values and where might these stem from? That is, the lives of museum educators need to be explored within their respective holistic contexts to begin to understand their identities, as I have defined the term in the previous section. To understand the complex world of museum education, studies that move beyond survey examinations of museum educators' identities, or isolated explorations of their personal or professional histories are needed. The layered, interconnected, and idiosyncratic identities of museum educators need to be researched and made available as professional development resources, which is what this dissertation project attempts to do.

For the past thirty years, the world of teacher education research has increasingly valued such context- and narrative-driven explorations into the personal and professional identities of teachers (Alsup, 2006; Ball & Goodson, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 2000; Goodson, 1981, 1992, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Knowles, 1992; Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005; Munro, 1998; O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Ovens, 2009; Prescesky, 1997; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Smith-Shank, 1993; Szabad-Smyth, 2005). Xu and Connelly (2010) noted that this increased focus on narrative inquiry “reflects the current movement of qualitative inquiry more generally” (p. 350), which is influenced by the rise in postmodernist thought. Polkinghorne (2010) has observed that since practice, such as a teaching practice, is a “process that occurs through time, it is better conducted and communicated about by the use of narrative thinking” (p. 395). Goodson pointed out that one of the reasons for this new focus on connecting the personal and professional in teacher education research specifically is the fact that,

...in the accounts they give about life in schools, teachers constantly refer to personal and biographical factors. From their point of view, it would seem that professional practices are embedded in wider life concerns. We need to listen closely to their views on the relationship between “school life” and “whole life” for in that dialectic crucial tales about careers and commitments will be told. (1992, p. 16)

Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted that, since “teachers play a key role in interpreting, mediating and realizing what goes on in educational institutions, their values, motivations and understandings have considerable influence on professional practices of all kinds” (p. 57). They believe that life history research offers an exceptional means to explore the personal influences that shape teachers’ beliefs and practices.

I believe that this is also true of educators in the museum. Museum educators are situated in informal learning settings that are laden with a different set of circumstances

and dynamics from formal education environments. But there are fundamental similarities between these two professions—schoolteachers and museum educators develop and implement curricula; these are deeply personal processes. Goodson (1981) argued that teaching is an exceptionally personal process, and thus it is “critical we know about the person the teacher is” (p. 69). Likewise, Beynon astutely noted that “unless we first understand teachers we can hardly understand teaching” (1985, p. 158). Alsup (2006) also argued that a teacher’s identity comprises both the personal (private) and the professional (public). She believes that in teacher education, it is essential to examine both spaces in an integrated manner. If we were to ignore this, it could “result in an overly simplistic, essentially unsuccessful teacher education” (p. xiv). Alsup aptly argued that the personal affects the professional and vice versa.

The reflective, narrative, holistic turn in teacher research and education has produced a substantial amount of literature that can assist museum education researchers and museum educators in their professional development. In the following section, I outline theoretical literature from the field of formal education research that has been influential in the development of this dissertation project. These ideas will be expanded upon in the following chapter, where I further examine the theoretical foundations of life history research and how this methodology can be practically implemented.

The Holistic Turn in Teacher Research: Linking the Professional and the Personal

During the 1960s, teachers’ voices were muffled and relegated to the sidelines of educational research (Ball & Goodson, 1985). Ball and Goodson, both of whom are influential educational researchers, argued that teachers were made into “shadowy figures in the educational landscape mainly known, or unknown through large-scale surveys or

historical analysis of their position in society” (1985, p. 6). With this type of research, teachers were “viewed as objects of study rather than as knowing professionals or agents of change” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 1). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this reality began to change as case studies of school situations became more popular, particularly the way that students were “processed” in the system (Goodson, 1992); as Goodson remarked, these studies were largely not in favor of the teacher. By the late 1970s, there came a further shift, as studies began to focus on the limitations and constraints within which teachers had to work, altering people’s perception of the teacher from villain to victim of the system. Goodson argued that this transformation finally stimulated educational researchers to examine “how teachers saw their work and their lives” (p. 4).

In 1981, Goodson contended that the research that had surfaced in the late 1970s still did not confront “the complexity of the schoolteacher as an active agent making his or her own history” (p. 69). He believed that contextually sensitive research was needed, with an emphasis on how teachers’ past career and life experiences form their perspectives on teaching and the way they implement these perspectives (Goodson, 1981; Ball & Goodson, 1985). Goodson also claimed that, in examining such histories, researchers needed to place the stories into their respective contexts. In other words, Goodson believes that teachers’ biographies and the cultural, social, and political contexts within which these biographies exist are essential to understanding their professional identities. Britzman (1999) would agree with Goodson’s assertions, as she believes teacher identity is intricate, layered, and more complex than role definition. As Goodson has pointed out, conducting life history research is a way for educational

researchers to examine teachers' lived experiences within their respective contexts. However, it must be noted that other narrative inquiry-based methodologies, such as autobiography, life narrative, memory work, and personal history, also explore lived experiences through the use of personal reflections and often involve contextual examinations.

Starting in the 1980s, amidst the postmodernist movement, research began to include more context-sensitive, narrative-based, qualitative methods, rather than solely objective methodologies that concentrate on portions of experiences in isolated and reduced ways (Elliott, 2005; Goodson 2000; O'Reilly-Scanlon, 1992). This provided an ideal climate to support life history research and other narrative-based inquiries into teachers' realities (Goodson, 2000; Goodson & Gill, 2011). The notion that all communities have the right to express their own realities in their own voices and to have those realities accepted as valid research accounts was beginning to blossom. This supportive environment enabled such research to begin to surface more during the 1980s (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Beynon, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Goodson, 1981). Goodson asserted that this turn to studying teachers' lives, their work, and the connections between the two represented,

...an attempt to generate a counter-culture that will resist the tendency to return teachers to the shadows; a counter-culture based upon a research mode that above all places teachers at the center of the action and seeks to sponsor "the teacher's voice". (2000, p. 16)

In other words, as Goodson has put it, "the way we study teachers reflects the value we put on them" (p. 14). This belief in valuing the teacher in research by expressing and examining his or her story continues to gain in strength today.

Many research projects on teacher identity, particularly over the past twenty

years, have placed the teacher's voice at the center through narrative-based research methodologies. Many of these projects exposed connections between teachers' personal and professional lives, placing the teachers' stories in context. The following section examines a small sampling of the vast number of narrative-based research projects that explore these connections. The research projects chosen exemplify certain teacher realities that are similar to those of museum educators.

Related Projects: Exploring the Personal and the Professional in Teacher Education

In the field of education research, a number of studies have focused on examining the tensions between teachers' belief systems and institutional realities (e.g., Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1999; Munro, 1998; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). In their book *Teacher Narrative as Critical Inquiry*, Ritchie and Wilson (2000) presented detailed narratives of four educators and noted the common conflict between teachers' beliefs and the realities of their teaching situations revealed by these stories. Current pre-service education programs and educational research promote subjective and holistic approaches to learning and teaching. Furthermore, many teachers' belief systems are aligned with the transformative potentials inherent in such pedagogical approaches. Yet, the institutional realities ingrained in many schools often push such practices to the sidelines. Alsup (2006) also noted the common discrepancies between teachers' core personal beliefs and institutional realities. As a teacher educator, Alsup believes in encouraging student teachers to continue to stay true to their core beliefs and value systems when entering schools and experiencing the realities of the teaching profession. She stated:

I never encourage my students to capitulate—to give up the personal beliefs that are often the very basis for why they became teachers in the first place—in order to “fit in” with the stereotypical culture of many American schools. (p. xiv)

Likewise, Britzman (1999) has examined the process of new teachers negotiating and creating their identities within schools:

This is the work of carving out one's own territory within preestablished borders, of desiring to be different while negotiating institutional mandates for conformity, and of constructing one's teaching voice from the stuff of past, that is, student experience. (p. 54)

In their book, Ritchie and Wilson (2000) demonstrated ways in which teachers could revisit and potentially reignite their passion for their beliefs by exploring their personal narratives. It is their contention that

...change is made possible and becomes sustainable when teachers gain critical perspective on how their identities have been constructed by/in their culture and how the cultural narratives of teaching have shaped their personal and professional subjectivities. (p. 24)

They asserted that, for such narrative explorations to be transformative, the context of the stories and potential meanings within them must be investigated. That is, if narratives are critically analyzed, new knowledge can emerge and participants and readers have the opportunity to make positive changes in their professional lives.

In these times of transition in museums, museum educators are experiencing similar discrepancies between their visions and their realities. Many museum educators are caught in a difficult position: they have been engaged to help the museum reach its mandate, goals, and objectives for greater public accountability, yet are not provided with sufficient resources or adequate power within the institution to effect sustained change. Furthermore, their visions for education may not coincide with those of the institution. These circumstances could leave museum educators feeling a sense of disconnect between their beliefs and their practices. This could begin to be remedied or at least recognized through the production of literature on self-study practices that focus on the

connections between their professional and personal lives.

A number of researchers have examined the connections between teachers' past experiences as students and how these experiences influenced their beliefs, attitudes, and practices as teachers (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Smith-Shank, 1993; Szabad-Smyth, 2002). As O'Reilly-Scanlon (2000) noted, with the "increased awareness and appreciation for teachers' beliefs, values, stories and voices, more and more research has shown how a teacher's past experience as a *learner* has shaped his or her current practice as a *teacher*" (p. 49). In her doctoral dissertation, O'Reilly-Scanlon (2000) examined how teachers' memories of their own teachers translate into their work. She recognized that student teachers enter their programs with strong "beliefs and images of teachers" (p. 26), which she noted is largely a result of their having such extensive experience in the classroom setting, albeit as students. A central premise that runs through her dissertation is that teachers often have a lasting impact on students—what they say, how they say it, and how they act often remains in people's minds. Using memory work and self-study, O'Reilly-Scanlon specifically focused on how the process of remembering shapes memories in terms of how and what is recalled and how school-related memories are "manifested in the work of teachers" (p. 3). She facilitated a process of self-study with three teachers and herself. In reflecting on her experience with self-study and memory work in her dissertation, O'Reilly-Scanlon stated:

...it seems that through the interrogation of my memories, I have (been) able to make sense of things previously taken for granted—as I begin to understand more fully why I approach teaching and students the way I do, what my stereotypes of teachers are, why I became a teacher in the first place and how I can begin to live my life more deliberately. (p. 192)

She concluded that examining our pasts provides "possibilities and potential to change

the *future*” (p. 206). She also noted that, through self-study and memory work, “we have opportunities to situate our memories within the larger societal context” (p. 193). These memories can be shared with and connect to others.

In her dissertation, Szabad-Smyth (2002) also investigated the power of teachers’ past experiences on their professional practices. She examined generalist teachers’ previous experiences with art inside and outside of the art classroom. Noting the marginalization of art in schools, she began to question what the sources of generalist teachers’ “insecurities, fears and in some cases apathy” (2005, p. 70) related to art were. She asked:

...could there be a link between how teachers felt and thought about art and their own art-making abilities (disabilities) and how they taught art in their classrooms? How might teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about art and art education contribute to the marginalization of art in the elementary classroom? (p. 70)

Using a life history research model, Szabad-Smyth looked into the meaning of art throughout the lives of four generalist teachers who were teaching visual arts as part of their curriculum. She collaborated with the participants to discover connections between their positive and negative experiences with art, both in and outside of the classroom, and their professional beliefs and practices. Through this study, Szabad-Smyth guided her participants towards learning about themselves as “makers of art” and “teachers of art” and their beliefs associated with these roles. Thus, the project became a form of self-study for the teachers in the project. Like O’Reilly-Scanlon, Szabad-Smyth discussed the transformative potential of self-study. She concluded that conducting such studies creates an increased possibility that generalist “teachers will eventually cease to carry on the tradition of teaching art only on Friday afternoons as a reward for good behavior” (2005, p. 80).

Past art experiences left lasting and formative impacts on the educators presented in O'Reilly-Scanlon and Szabad-Smyth's studies. I believe that memories of positive and negative art museum experiences have similar lasting impacts on art museum educators, which may affect their beliefs and attitudes towards museums and education in museums, along with their professional practices. Returning to these memories could assist museum educators in understanding the origins of their beliefs about museum education, clarifying just what those beliefs are, and developing stronger voices within their professions.

Prescesky's (1997) dissertation examined how music education students develop their identities as music educators. She observed that music educators often have "a dual identity, one as a musician and the other as educator" (p. 2). Furthermore, they are often seen as "second class citizens" by professors and students majoring in performance and form a minority group. These realities have led many music education students to experience identity conflicts, indicating a need for them to work towards an understanding of the "connections that exist between personal histories, university experiences, and professional roles" (p. 12) in order to assist them in comprehending their identities. In her study, she examined four music education students' conceptions of themselves as both musicians and educators. She also explored their biographies, as told by the participants through narrative, to pinpoint links between their self-perceptions and their personal histories. Prescesky worked with these educators to connect their "images of self-as-musician and self-as-educators" (p. iii). She suggested that the "cycle of mediocrity," which leaves music educators voiceless and powerless, can begin to be broken by implementing reflective, autobiographical practices, such as those utilized in her project, as music educators will have an opportunity to examine who they are.

Similarities can be drawn between Prescesky's picture of music educators and the current realities of museum educators. Just as music educators juggle dual identities as performers and educators, museum educators are called on to wear many hats and exist between many disciplines—art historian, artist, community worker, educator, and so on. Prescesky suggested that music educators are often perceived as second-class performers; similarly, museum educators are often seen as second-class art historians when compared to curators, even though the goals for each profession are very different. If reflective, biographical practices are incorporated into education and professional development programs for museum educators, there may be a greater chance of transforming the “cycle of mediocrity” present in the world of museum education.

These projects demonstrate the potentially transformative nature of such explorations for the teachers themselves and for the teachers and teacher educators who read these research accounts. As Britzman (1999) has put it: “Linking identity to practices and to sociality may well allow us to rethink the visions we can have about what teachers can become and who we can become as teachers” (p. 71). Museum educators are currently experiencing numerous challenges, many of which are similar to those of today's teachers. As museum educators' roles are changing, they are struggling to find their places and voices in their institutions. Holistic, contextual, narrative explorations of museum educator identity could assist in this effort.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced my research paradigm, which is heavily influenced by postmodern thought. Many postmodern ideologies surfaced in the second portion of this chapter, where I reviewed research that has greatly informed this dissertation work. This

chapter revealed that art museum education has increasingly leaned towards postmodern practices, in which visitors' personal narratives are encouraged to shine, visitors are engaged in holistic ways, and context is championed. It was demonstrated that the museum education profession has been confronted with great changes, which have led museum education scholars to suggest that museum educators need to reexamine their identities. Contemporary identity research was shown to uphold many postmodern tendencies, in that selfhood is seen as being a malleable, context-driven, dialogue-dependent, and experiential concept. Several examinations of museum professionals' identities were explored. The lack of qualitative, holistic, and dialogic research into museum educators' identities was questioned. Finally, it was suggested that we could begin filling this gap in the research by turning to narrative methods often used to examine teacher identity in formal education settings. This dissertation endeavors to contribute to strengthening museum educators' voices in their institutions and in the research literature, aiming to help these professionals feel more at home in their places of work. The following chapter examines the methodology and procedures that were used in this effort, all of which are aligned with postmodern thought.

Chapter Three

Underlying Plot: Methodology and Procedures

There is an intimate relationship between our conception of what the products of research are to look like and the way we go about doing research. What we think it means to do research has to do with our conception of meaning, our view of cognition, and our beliefs about the forms of consciousness that we are willing to say advance human understanding—an aim, I take it, that defines the primary mission of research. (Eisner, 1997, p. 5)

In this chapter, I present the underlying plot of this dissertation: the methodology and procedures employed. The chapter outlines how I went about doing this research. These approaches support my research paradigm and offer a means to effectively explore museum educators' identities. First, I highlight the research framework employed—life history research—examining the essential principles and practices associated with this approach. The methods and procedures that guided this process are then presented, including questions of rigor and integrity, the selection of participants, the development of the interview questions, the collection of data, and the processes of data analysis, interpretation, and representation.

Introducing the Framework

This dissertation holistically and contextually inquired into the rich personal and professional identities of museum educators by examining their own lived experiences. An essential component of the research was to place the participants' lived experiences at the forefront. The voices of museum educators are far too often relegated to the sidelines of their institutions and in the museum education research literature. It was also important to provide a comfortable dialogic research process for the participants so that they could freely share their personal and professional stories.

It was necessary to work with a methodology whose structure and epistemologies would enable me to explore the above-mentioned goals and would coincide with a postmodern orientation. Elliot Eisner (2008) reminds us: “What one needs to research in a situation must be appropriate for the circumstances one addresses and the aims one attempts to achieve” (p. 4). The primary methodological framework employed, life history research, provided a contextual approach for inquiry into the identities of museum educators, in keeping with a postmodern conception of identity. By using this methodology, I was able to engage in a comfortable, dialogic relationship with the participants. This framework enabled their lived experiences to play a paramount role. Life history research provided a means to reveal the unique identities of the participating museum educators and allow their voices to be heard.

Life History Research: Multiple Meanings, Contextual Understandings

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain in-depth insight into the participating museum educators’ identities in order to come to a greater understanding of the contemporary reality of their profession. As Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles, two prominent life history researchers, have noted, life history researchers believe that “every in-depth exploration of an individual life-in-context brings us that much closer to understanding the complexities of lives in communities” (2001, p. 11). Denzin (1989) noted that an individual life history account “may pertain to the collective life of a group, organization, or community” (p. 41). Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) have championed the insight that this methodology can bring to efforts to understand larger human conditions. They stated: “Life history and narrative offer exciting alternatives for connecting the lives and stories of individuals to the understanding of the larger human and social

phenomena” (p. 113). Therefore the identities of a group of people cannot effectively be generalized or reduced to scientific numerical data. Rather, it is in the stories of individual lives in context that we can come to a greater understanding of individuals and their communities. As Cole and Knowles succinctly put it, “the general can best be understood through analysis of the particular” (p. 13). Thus, local, context-driven, personal stories replace the modernist concept of the grand narrative (Goodson & Gill, 2011). This methodology values the lived experiences of individual community members, placing their stories at the center of the research.

As outlined in the previous chapter, museum educators are often marginalized in their institutions, and their voices are typically muffled. Taking this unfortunate reality into account, it was of the utmost importance for me to find a methodology that regards individual voices as worthy and powerful. Petra Munro (1998) has spoken of the potential for life history research to “recover the lost voices of women who have been denied public space” (p. 9). She further elaborated on this activist nature of life history research: “The greatest strength of life history is in its penetration of the subjective reality of the individual; it allows the subject to speak for himself or herself” (p. 9). Munro noted that exploring the lives of individuals in their respective contexts is directly linked to taking their stories seriously, acknowledging that their conversations are “more than just ‘idle talk’ or mere gossip” (p. 5). Likewise, Goodson (1991), in referring to life history work and teachers, declared, “The proposal I am recommending is essentially one of reconceptualising educational research so as to assure that the teacher’s voice is heard, heard loudly, heard articulately” (p. 36). Similarly, Bathmaker (2010) asserted: “A significant and important feature of narrative and life history research is that they provide

a means of getting closer to the experience of those whose lives and histories go unheard, unseen, undocumented” (p. 3). She went on to suggest that this work “moves to restore individual agency” (p. 3). Correspondingly, Fontana and Frey (1998) claimed: “Often oral history is a way to reach groups and individuals who have been ignored, oppressed, and/or forgotten” (p. 61). Munro, Goodson, Bathmaker, and Fontana and Frey all contended—and I wholly agree with them—that life history research provides a suitable methodology for exploring lives that have been marginalized in the past, as it champions individuals’ subjective viewpoints and sponsors the postmodern notion that all groups have a right to express themselves through their own voices (Bathmaker, 2010; Fontana & Frey, 1998; Goodson, 2001; Munro, 1993).

There has been a recent surge in the use of personal experience methods in projects that attempt to attain a greater understanding of aspects of the human condition (Cole & Knowles, 2001), as postmodern approaches continue to gain in popularity in social science practices (Elliott, 2005; Goodson & Gill, 2011). A wide variety of methods are linked to personal experience research. Cole and Knowles (2001) identified the following list of methods associated with this approach:

...autobiography, autoethnography, biography, case history, case study, ethnography, interpretive biography, life history, life narrative, life story, narrative, narrative account, oral history, oral narrative, personal experience story, personal history and story. (p. 15)

Cole and Knowles noted that it is often difficult to make clear distinctions between these personal experience methods. Furthermore, as Tierney (2003) pointed out, life history has been subject to a variety of definitions. Cole and Knowles contended that what sets life history research apart from some of these related methods is its attention to context.

Likewise, Goodson (1992) emphasized, “The life history is the life story located within

its historical context” (p. 6). Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted that life history research aims to “locate’ the life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances” (p. 62). Attention to cultural, political, familial, educational, professional, and religious contexts is common in this methodology (Cole & Knowles, 2001). This is linked to life history research’s emphasis on exploring individuals’ experiences in order to “make broader contextual meaning” (p. 20). Munro (1998) also emphasized the role of context in this methodological approach when she wrote “a life history provides a historical, contextual dimension” (p. 9). Cole and Knowles’ proclamation that “Context is everything” could certainly be the slogan for life history research practices.

Through its emphasis on lives in context, life history research naturally examines individuals’ holistic identities. Goodson and Sikes (2001) referred to this holistic orientation to identity:

Life history demands an holistic approach and, therefore, forces us to think about the relationship between different aspects of our lives, and about the influence and impact that our different (social) selves might have for, and on, each other. (p. 73)

Similarly, Munro (1998) claimed that, in telling their histories through this methodology, individuals are able to come to understand what Bakhtin (2006) called the “dialogic self,” which comprises the intricate relationship between one’s self and one’s culture, as developed through and expressed by language. In expressing experiences through storytelling—language—in life history research interviews, participants explore and develop their identities. Munro elaborated: “Life history interviews are themselves texts designed to not only give shape to some feature of experience but ultimately to create a self” (1998, p. 6). This identity reflection and creation makes life history work a promising strategy for professional development. Goodson and Sikes (2001) referred to

the emphasis on “improved self-knowledge” (p. 73) in life history research, which asks participants to examine and reflect upon their lives in order to better understand where their beliefs and values originated, as well as how their past experiences may influence their futures. Thus, this methodological framework enabled my participants and myself to explore and develop our identities as museum educators in a holistic manner, which could potentially be considered a form of professional development. These were among the major aims of this dissertation.

Through this methodology, participants tell their stories—their identities—to the researcher, who then examines these stories in analyzing and representing the data. Goodson and Sikes (2001) asserted that life history research is a joint endeavor between the researcher and the participants. They stated, “The life history is collaboratively constructed by a life story teller and life story interviewer/researcher” (p. 62). Thus, this methodological framework is grounded upon the relationship between the researched and the researcher, where the researched tells life stories and the researcher aims to “locate’ the life story as it operates in particular historical circumstances” (p. 62). This relationship is a complicated one, in that the researcher must speak for the participant in a way that simultaneously attempts to authentically express the participant’s viewpoints while unabashedly demonstrating the subjective nature of the researcher’s interpretations. As Cole and Knowles (2001) emphasized, this representation of another by the researcher is an “intensely personal endeavor” (p. 46). They caution that to claim that one is objective in analyzing others’ life stories is “to act in bad faith with those whom we research” (p. 47). In order to avoid this, these authors encourage life history researchers to:

...articulate clearly, within the definitions of their work, the humanness—the fundamental assumptions, experiences, and passions behind their inquiries—as an authentic way to engage in and represent the complexities of their findings. To do this is to honor oneself, those who are the focus of the inquiries, and the journey or journeys taken. (p. 48)

Since life history research demands a personal relationship between participants and researcher, in which the researcher requests participants to share their stories and then interprets and represents these stories, a relationship based upon trust and care must be established. Cole and Knowles (2001) have, I believe, accurately suggested that relationships between researchers and participants in life history research should be based upon the same principles that we apply to relationships in our everyday lives. They proposed that relationality, mutuality, empathy, care, sensitivity and respect be the primary principles that should guide life history research relationships. Cole and Knowles believe that these principles are “both emblematic of and crucial to life history researching” (p. 26). These principles are the basis of authentic, meaningful, and lasting relationships. Having always used such principles to guide my personal and professional relationships, it was important that my relationships with my participants were grounded in the same ethics.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) employ the image of a quilt maker as a metaphor for the qualitative researcher. They suggest that the qualitative researcher, like the quilter, “stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together” (p. 7). Since life history researchers sensitively and artfully stitch our own stories and our participants’ stories together, I believe we can be metaphorically viewed as quilt makers—more specifically, story quilt makers. Life history researchers stitch the lived experiences of their participants into their respective contexts and layer the multiple participating voices together, creating a new,

contextual, and holistic image. The new quilted story is exhibited for audiences, moving the personal to the political. This artful, layered, contextual, personal, subjective approach to research provided me with a means to explore the identities of the participating museum educators through an overtly postmodern lens.

Methods and Procedures

The methods and procedures employed in this research will be described in the following sections. The methodological framework examined above, life history research, was used to guide the resulting methods and procedures.

Maintaining Rigor and Integrity

Rigor can refer to the standards or criteria that are used to determine the quality of a research project (Cole & Knowles, 2001). These standards or criteria are often directly linked to notions of validity and reliability. Current conceptions of validity and reliability are still based upon measurable results and objectivist notions, making them compatible with quantitative research practices. Validity in the objectivist sense refers to tests and measures that aim to develop certainty. Reliability from this perspective refers to the “consistency and stability of measuring instruments” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 93) and the applicability of results across samples.

A number of researchers have written about the ineffectiveness of applying such traditional notions of validity and reliability to qualitative inquiries (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Kvale, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Webster & Mertova, 2007, to name a few). Qualitative research, including life history research, focuses on complex, layered, subjective, and personal lived experiences. Following postmodern notions of knowledge, qualitative researchers value these individual experiences and idiosyncratic ways of

knowing. These researchers do not aim for generalizations or quantifiable results, nor do they search for an accurate, precise record of events, as is the case with quantitative explorations. These characteristics make it difficult to examine qualitative research, including life history inquiries, for validity and reliability in the same way as more conventional approaches to research. Kvale (1995) has argued that adhering to traditional notions of validity and reliability in qualitative research actually works against the goals of such research and demonstrates a lack of confidence in one's own work:

A strong focus on validity in research may foster an emphasis on testing and verification of knowledge rather than on exploration and creative generation of new knowledge. The issues of control and legitimation come to dominate over and hamper creativity and production of new insights...A strong accentuation on validation may also be an expression of uncertainty of the value and worth of one's own product, a requirement of external confirmation of [the] value of one's work through some official certificates of validity. (pp. 36-37)

Goodson and Sikes (2001) wrote: "When someone tells their story as part of a life history research project they are involved in a creative act, irrespective of how committed they are to telling the 'truth,' or telling it as it was" (p. 48).

Thus, since life history research is ultimately a fluid, creative approach to research that aims to reveal new insights into individual and social identities, working with traditional conceptions of validation and reliability would hinder the project. Therefore, it would only make sense for life history inquiries to have their own criteria and standards for determining and promoting rigor. The way in which one judges the success and rigor of a project needs to be "fundamentally tied to the epistemological roots of the research methodology" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 123). Cole and Knowles (2001) noted that standards and criteria need to coincide with the particular context or method employed in the research project. They astutely claimed that "To use the criteria of validity, reliability,

and generalizability to assess a life history study, for example, would be like examining the contents of a barrel of apples in order to decide which orange to buy” (p. 123).

In determining how their individual project can “best be judged” (2001, p. 123), some researchers, such as Webster and Mertova (2007) choose to assign new meanings to positivist terminology associated with rigor. Others employ a “one-to-one correspondence” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 123) between positivist and post-positivist language connected to rigor. Still others reject positivist language and related frameworks, and opt for vocabulary that reflects the epistemological origins of their work (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Cole and Knowles (2001) subscribe to this last approach when describing their method for ensuring rigor in life history research projects. They list features they believe are essential to such research. These authors contend that these features can serve as standards or criteria for judging the quality of a life history research project. Their approach connects to my own vision of rigor in life history research. Thus, I employed these features in this dissertation as a means to gauge the quality of my research. They include:

Intentionality: Cole and Knowles (2001) acknowledged that life history research “must stand for something” (p. 126). The work aims to advance the understanding of the interactions between individual lives and the social and institutional contexts in which they exist. It is important for life history interviews to remain focused on these intentions, and for researchers to not become voyeurs into the aspects of the participants’ lives that do not yield insight into the goals of the research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). This dissertation aimed to explore the links between the personal and professional lives of museum educators in order to gain

a better understanding of their identities. The semi-structured interviews were designed to remain focused on this intention. Furthermore, life history research aims to “contribute to the creation of more just and dignified explorations and renderings of the human condition” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 126). Since no extensive qualitative research into the identities of museum educators as told through their own stories exists, and since the voices of museum educators are often muffled in their institutions, this dissertation aimed to provide a more dignified exploration of their realities.

Researcher Presence: The researcher is to be unabashedly present in life history research. There is to be a clear attempt to “reveal the intersection of a researcher’s life with that or those of the researched” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 126). I wholly agree with Sikes’ (2010) contention that it seems “unethical to offer a version of someone’s life (or indeed of any social phenomenon) without making clear the nature of the gaze that is being brought to bear upon it” (p. 13). In order to reveal my gaze, I have outlined my epistemological standing (see Chapter Two); I offer anecdotal narratives that explore the origins of my epistemological and ontological positions; I present my character profile as a participant (see Chapter Eight); and I included myself in the cross-case analysis with other participants (see Chapter Nine). I would also include transparency in this category. Throughout this dissertation, my biases and experiences that could contribute to my interpretation of the results were explored in my journal writing and were acknowledged throughout the text, making them transparent to audiences.

Methodological Commitment: Cole and Knowles suggest that “Sound life history research reflects a methodological commitment through evidence of a *principled process* and *procedural harmony*” (2001, p. 127), which should be grounded in a set of guiding principles. The principles they suggest are largely based upon those that would also be employed to develop positive relationships outside of the research process. These include “relationality, mutuality, empathy, care, sensitivity and respect” (p. 126). This dissertation grew out of and adhered to the same principles. I aimed to infuse such relational, human qualities into the more sterile existing research into museum educators.

Holistic Quality: As Cole and Knowles noted, life history research is a holistic process, unlike traditional research practices that lean more towards linear, compartmentalized approaches. There is an attempt to provide coherence, consistency, and authenticity in this research, which aims to achieve a seamless quality, where everything is linked together. This holistic approach encourages a high level of truthfulness and verisimilitude. In this dissertation, I employed questions that could evoke layering of recollections, I requested clarification when required during the interview process, I cross-referenced stories with the written biographies and annals provided by the participants, participants reviewed and made changes to the transcripts and chapters outlining their character profiles, and I linked all of these stories together in the development of an extensive cross-case analysis. These processes ensured a holistic, authentic, and sincere research project.

Communicability: Cole and Knowles emphasize the audience in their approach to life history research. They underline the importance of accessibility in this research. Such research is “intended to have an evocative quality and a high level of resonance for audiences of all kinds” (2001, p. 126). To achieve this goal, this dissertation employed accessible language and presented evocative narrative accounts.

Knowledge Claims: As Sikes (2010) contended, “We need to always remember the significance of language, and weigh up carefully how the words and phrases, the discourses, we use can be understood and experienced” (p. 16). Cole and Knowles asserted that “knowledge claims must be made with sufficient ambiguity and humility to allow for multiple interpretations and reader response” (2001, p. 127). I acknowledged throughout this dissertation that the knowledge claims I have made pertain to the five museum educators who participated in this project and aim to provide insight into the contemporary realities of museum educators. The interpretations I presented reflect the particular context of working with these participants, and offer a level of ambiguity to the reader, with the intention of enabling “multiple interpretations and reader response” (p. 127).

Contributions: Cole and Knowles emphasize that life history research should aim to have theoretical potential, in that it should provide insight into the individual lives of the participants and the general human condition. This project facilitated a process of meaning-making for the individuals involved and developed insight into the world of museum educator identity. Furthermore, Cole and Knowles suggested that research should be transformative in that it should assist in

imagining new possibilities. This dissertation worked toward developing new possibilities for understanding the profession of museum education and for educational programs for museum educators.

It is my belief that by conscientiously following the above-mentioned elements of life history research outlined by Cole and Knowles, researchers will have a greater opportunity to maintain a high level of integrity, which is of the utmost importance in life history research projects. In life history research, power relations, relationship development, and ethical considerations are integral to the research itself, rather than being a side component to be acknowledged only as part of a mandatory protocol. As Goodson and Sikes pointed out, “Compared with populations for other types of research, life history informants are required to make a considerable commitment in terms of time and intimacy of involvement” (2001, p. 90). These authors go on to note that this high level of intimacy increases the potential for harm. Life history researchers have a responsibility to continuously consider how their research processes and products affect the participants (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). I agree with Gates, Church, and Crowe’s (2001) proclamation that “Ethical relationships are the binding matrix of life history research” (p. 152). Similarly, Yow (2005) reminds us that researchers must not allow their ends to supersede consideration for their participants. Participants come first. By adhering to the above-mentioned features of life history research, I meticulously attempted to maintain a high standard of integrity in this dissertation.

Selecting the Participants

The in-depth, intimate nature of life history research practices means that researchers must often reach out to their circle of colleagues and friends in their

participant selection process (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Many qualitative researchers turn to a variety of formal selection methods, such as “unique-case sampling,” “ideal-typical-bellwether-case sampling,” and “snowball sampling” (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Cole and Knowles argued that these and many other seemingly rigorous methods simply “dress up commonsense ideas in scientific garb” (p. 66). They claim that, when these techniques are used in qualitative projects, they perpetuate the “scientization of research into human thought” (p. 66), which Cole and Knowles attempt to avoid in their research. Instead, these scholars promote the development of sound, accessible research along with language that supports this aim. They emphasize that participant selection in life history research does not aim to achieve “population representativeness”. Rather, life history researchers develop their own individual criteria for participant selection that support depth over breadth. I agree with their commonsense approach to participant selection—one that attempts to produce not generalizations of findings but specific, in-depth, contextual explorations. As Cole and Knowles put it,

It is much more important to work thoroughly, meaningfully, and authentically with one participant than to end up with very partial and sketchy understandings based on work with several or many. As the old saying goes, “a half-done job is not worth doing”. (p. 67)

Life history research projects typically involve a small number of participants, who are committed to engaging in an in-depth study with the researcher, usually over a number of meetings (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Goodson and Sikes (2001) have noted that life history researchers typically believe that “large samples are unnecessary and even inappropriate because objective, etic and nomothetic generalization is not the ultimate aim” (p. 22). My dissertation research maintained this characteristic of the framework. I gathered a small group of participants: four museum educators and myself. The

participants were found through my network of colleagues and friends. Boeije (2010) has asserted that all participants in a qualitative study have some feature(s) in common. The common feature that I searched for in my participant selection was that the participants had to be practicing museum educators at the time of the research or to have recently held a museum education position in an art museum in Canada. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) pointed out, “several life stories *taken from the same set of sociostructural relations* support each and make up, all together, a strong body of evidence” (p. 24).

Prior to conducting this research, I had established relationships with two of the chosen participants. Since life history projects require a significant commitment from participants over the course of several months, it is not uncommon for researchers to invite participation from those already well known to them (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Camille⁴ and I first met in 2004 when I was starting my master’s degree at Concordia University. We immediately became friends and collaborative colleagues as we both demonstrated a passion for museum education. Our friendship continued even after Camille moved out of the country and I remained in Montreal. She eventually relocated to a small town a couple of hours outside of a city in Ontario, where she was engaged as an art gallery educator in the town’s gallery. Camille had shown a strong interest in participating in my dissertation research, even before I completed my dissertation proposal. When we met for lunch one summer day, I mentioned the direction I wanted to take my research in. She immediately requested that she be involved as a participant. Camille has a natural inclination towards reflective practices and is a natural at research. She informed me that she wanted to be engaged in this research process to begin to

⁴ Pseudonyms have been used for all participants to protect their identities.

understand the origins of her beliefs, attitudes, and practices in her work. The process was clearly a form of professional development for Camille; it was also a precious opportunity for Camille and me to spend time together. On December 15, 2009, I emailed an invitation to Camille (see Appendix A), which outlined the purposes of the research, along with the commitments, the participant's rights, and the timeline for participation. She quickly and enthusiastically accepted the invitation.

Emma and I were also first introduced to each other in 2004 in Montreal. I was hired as a teaching assistant for a community art education program in a university setting during my first year in the master's program at Concordia University. At the time, Emma was an instructor for one of the courses in said community art education program. We worked together over the course of three years in this capacity. Emma has also been a mentor to me with my research work. During the developmental stages of my master's thesis, I consulted with her to inquire into her experiences as a community arts educator in an artist-run center, as my master's research centered on this domain (Reid, 2008, 2012). I was also familiar with Emma's art education master's thesis, which was laden with reflective practices. I imagined that Emma would potentially be interested in engaging in my reflection-based dissertation in order to examine the origins of her beliefs, attitudes, and practices relating to her work as an art educator in an artist-run center. In December 2009 I contacted Emma by phone to inquire into her potential interest in participating in my dissertation project. She was intrigued by my proposal, and informed me that she was interested in participating. During this discussion, she referred to being intrigued by the reflective nature of the project and expressed her interest in this process. She also noted that little work has currently been published in this area. On

December 15, 2009, I emailed the official invitation to Emma. She returned an email response confirming her participation.

Cole and Knowles (2001) noted that, in searching for participants, life history researchers “might happen upon individuals who, in the course of conversation, learn about and express an interest in our research” (p. 65). They refer to this as a process of serendipity. This is how I was first introduced to Daniel. In December 2009, I met Daniel at a mutual friend’s party. As I entered the house, I saw Daniel getting ready to leave. One of the hosts quickly introduced us and mentioned that Daniel used to be his colleague in an art museum. We immediately began discussing our mutual interest in art and art museums. I described my dissertation project to Daniel, who was clearly curious about the work. I mentioned that I was still selecting and inviting participants. Daniel immediately showed an interest in participating. He gave me his business card and left the party. On December 22, 2009, I emailed Daniel the official invitation to participate in the research. Within a few days, he responded by email stating that the project sounded very interesting and he would be glad to participate. Since I had only briefly met Daniel in passing, I felt it was important to meet with him again in person before the actual life history interviewing process began. We met in a coffee shop of his choice in Montreal one rainy afternoon, and began a process of becoming better acquainted with each other over tea and coffee. It was a wonderful way to start connecting with each other, as we were able to notice major similarities between our stories. By meeting face to face in this introductory, non-research session, we became more comfortable with each other, creating an opportunity for us to be able to delve deeper into Daniel’s personal stories during the actual life history interviews.

Cole and Knowles (2001) have pointed out that life history researchers will at times be introduced to potential participants through recommendations from someone “who understands the central elements of our project and perspective” (p. 65). This is how I was first introduced to Robert. In December 2009, my supervisor, Dr. Paul Langdon, suggested that I contact a previous student of his, Robert. During one of my graduate courses, I had read parts of Robert’s master’s thesis and thus I was familiar with his work in museums. I had also seen Robert at a conference in March 2009. Dr. Langdon informed me that Robert is a very active museum educator and artist, who would potentially be interested in participating in my research. From reading his master’s thesis, I was also aware of his interest in museum education research and the significance of dialogue in research and in the museum. In January 2010, I began searching for Robert’s contact information through the website of the art museum where he is employed. I found his email address and sent a message to him on January 29, 2010, which described my connection to him through Dr. Langdon and the nature of my research, and included an invitation to participate. Since Robert lives in a city in Ontario, I informed him that I would be very willing to travel to see him for this research. A few days later, Robert sent an email to inform me that he would like to participate. Because Robert lived quite a distance from Montreal, I was unable to meet with him prior to the life history interviewing process, as I had with Daniel. Instead, I took extra time during our first life history research meeting so we could become better acquainted with each other prior to formally beginning the interview.

Each art museum educator that I invited to participate in this study accepted very willingly, even enthusiastically. It was important to find participants who showed an

interest in embarking on a reflective research journey, as life history research involves deep work and a substantial time commitment. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), “it is essential that informants are prepared and able, in terms of both time and articulacy, to talk for extended periods” (p. 24). Each participant demonstrated an interest in participating in an in-depth reflective inquiry as a form of professional and personal development. This was striking to me, as I was initially intimidated and shy about inviting them to do so. I imagined that they would not have time or would potentially not be interested in participating in a project of this nature. My participants’ enthusiasm and commitment to the research was very moving to me and was of great importance in this research project.

Developing the Questions

Cole and Knowles (2001) believe that all research requires a deep interest on the part of the researcher but emphasize that this is especially important for research into the human condition and human experience. In their words, “such work must come from a deep professional and personal commitment” (p. 45). When this commitment is present, the resulting research will have a certain authenticity and authority and is “likely to have moral, social, intellectual, and political roots that are grounded in personal and professional experiences” (p. 45). In other words, research inquiries that emanate from the researcher’s past experiences—that reflect his or her identity—will be more honest, intriguing, and based on real-life experiences. As Cole and Knowles put it, “To research is to reveal the autobiographical—the self or elements of the self” (p. 45). Similarly, van Manen (1992) emphasized the importance of starting with one’s own experiences in inquiries into the lived experience. Goodson and Sikes (2001) proclaimed that, if life

history researchers are not deeply engaged with their inquiry, a number of adverse effects could arise:

1. They are unlikely to develop the sort of relationship with informants that tends to lead to “quality” data.
2. They are unlikely to be sufficiently sensitive to the central tenet of the approach—that, potentially at least, all aspects of life interact with and have implications for each other—to be able to make insightful use of the data.
3. They may even have a negative effect (to a greater or lesser degree, and in a variety of possible areas) on their informants. (p. 20)

In other words, if life history researchers are not deeply and personally engaged with their inquiry, the resulting research could be inauthentic, could lack depth and insight, and could even have a negative impact on their participants.

The following is an excerpt from a reflection conducted for a doctoral seminar course, in which I was developing my dissertation questions. This reflection touches upon some of the origins of my passion for museums:

Museums have been integral to my life from a very early age. My mother is an artist and introduced me to the potential excitement that can unfold in the museum space. I loved being a child—the associated curiosity, play, imagination and joy. These feelings and states of mind were encouraged in my early childhood experiences with museums. As an adult, I am transported back to this childlike world when in museums. The museum feels like a playground for me as an adult—a place where I can learn through curiosity and play. (Personal Reflection, September 23, 2008)

As the semester progressed, I began to wonder how these early experiences with museums affected my current reality as a museum educator and researcher. I also recognized the potential usefulness of this type of inquiry amidst the growing changes in the world of museum education. I started to become more and more inquisitive about the role of museum educators within this climate of change. Furthermore, I recognized that I had witnessed confusion and frustrations in the profession, indicating a need for further understanding regarding this often misunderstood area of expertise. It also came to my

attention during this reflective process that there is a lack of literature focusing on exploring museum educator realities and the specific experiences of museum educators. The following is an extract from a reflection that developed out of this process of questioning:

The role of the museum educator has become increasingly intricate. In order to better prepare museum educators to succeed and grow in this rapidly developing profession, it is imperative to develop an understanding of the current role of the museum educator. This leads to the following questions: What is the role of the museum educator amidst social change? How should museum educators be [educated] in order to be able to meet the profession's new demands? I propose to engage museum educators in a process of reflection through narrative inquiry, in order to explore these questions. In this way, practicing museum educators will contribute to the development of a vision of the role of the museum educator amidst social change. At the same time, these educators will embark on a process of professional development as they explore reflective inquiry as a means to enhancing their professional practice. (Personal Reflection, September 30, 2008)

Over time, my focus turned to the contemporary *identities* of museum educators as opposed to their *roles*. The term "role" is typically associated with tasks, and can be quite limiting. Britzman (1999) asserted that problems arise when identity is viewed as being synonymous with role and function, for this oversimplifies the nature of identity. As noted in the second chapter of this thesis, contemporary conceptions of identity are complex, contextual, and holistic, and thus are in line with life historical examinations. Therefore, by altering the terminology expressed in my questions, I was able to align my guiding questions with the epistemology associated with my primary methodological framework.

The resulting primary guiding question for my dissertation became: What are the personal and professional identities of museum educators as expressed by their life histories? The intimately related sub-questions were: How do these museum educators' past experiences influence their current developing identities? What are the connections

between their personal and professional identities? What are the connections between the stories of the participating museum educators? How might the process of life history research be applicable to the professional development of museum educators? How can research into the identities of museum educators strengthen their voices within their institutions and in society in general?

These questions all stemmed from my personal and professional experiences as a museum educator, museum education researcher, and life history researcher, and are thus of great interest to me. By selecting practicing museum educators who showed enthusiasm for the proposed reflective research practice, I ensured that these questions would also be of interest to my participants. All five of us were intrigued by this reflective, life-history-based, identity work, enabling the multifaceted identities of each participant to be authentically examined in depth.

Collecting the Data

The data collection process consisted of a series of steps that aimed to guide each participant to a greater understanding of his or her identity as a museum educator, and to allow me to begin to become acquainted with the lived experiences that had influenced these identities. This process was strongly influenced by literature and projects that focus on life history research approaches. However, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) pointed out, all life history projects “will have their own features and requirements and each researcher is likely to have their own personal style and a unique emotional engagement with any particular project” (p. 19). Thus, the series of procedures that were employed in this research project were uniquely suited to this particular inquiry.

The primary method of data collection for this project was one-to-one, in-depth interviews, which emphasized a dialogic relationship. Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted that the one-to-one interview between the participant and researcher is the most common means of collecting life history data. There are a number of variations in the terms used for life history interviews. Goodson (2001) has referred to these interviews as “grounded conversations”. Cole and Knowles (2001) employ the term “guided conversations” for their conception of life history interviews, where the “gathering of information becomes a conversation between ‘friends’ rather than as an interview with a stranger” (p. 72). What all of these terms have in common is an emphasis on the conversational characteristic of life history interviews, along with the aim to establish and maintain positive and trusting relationships between the participant and the researcher (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Thus, there is an attempt to establish a more equalized power dynamic between the researcher and participant. As Etheridge has noted,

When conducting life history research, there is a penetration of many layers of emotions. During the discussions, the participant should be in command of the discussion instead of the researcher trying to “coax” stories from the participant. (2004, p. 21)

This layered, emotional quality of life history interviewing calls for researchers to be transparent and vulnerable in order to establish a rapport with participants. Goodson and Sikes (2001) claimed that, for this reason,

...researchers are advised to share their own experiences and perceptions and to establish common ground through the clothes they wear, the interests they profess, the company they are seen to keep, the language they use and how they present themselves. (p. 28)

Participants are encouraged to insert their own questions and to move beyond the developed set of questions, once again emphasizing dialogue. Although these interviews

attempt to equalize power, emphasize the commonalities between participants and researchers, and focus on open dialogue, there is an obvious research focus, guided by the researcher, which cannot be ignored. I employ the term *life history interview* to describe the malleable yet focused research conversations that evolved in this dissertation.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) assert that the “research bargain”—“the understanding between the researcher and the informant about what the nature of their relationship is and what each can expect from their mutual participation” (p. 26)—is of the utmost importance in life history research projects. Thus, prior to beginning the data collection process, invitations to participate in the research were sent to the four museum educators—Camille, Emma, Robert, and Daniel—in December 2009 and January 2010 (see Appendix A). These invitations outlined the nature of the research and the time commitment involved in participating in the project. After these museum educators had informally agreed to participate, I sent each one a consent form that further outlined the project, the time commitment required, the confidential nature of the research, and the measures that would be taken to secure the data (see Appendix B). They were also sent a biographical data form with a series of questions that would help me begin to understand their profiles (see Appendix C). Along with this, they were given the series of guiding questions for the first life history interview, offering them an opportunity to become familiar with the topics that would be covered and encouraging a relationship built on trust and transparency (see Appendix D). When we met for our first interview, each participant gave me a signed consent form and a completed biographical data form. All of the participants committed to two interviews, each lasting approximately one to one and a

half hours. They also all agreed to being audio-recorded, and understood that they could stop the recording at any point during the life history interviews.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I engaged a fellow art educator to guide me through a life history interview, focusing on personal experiences as a museum visitor. Before engaging the participants in their second interview, I asked the same art educator to interview me again, focusing on my professional experiences as a museum educator. This interviewer employed the same set of guiding questions as were used in the life history interviews with the four participants. In this way, I was able to empathize with the interview situation I was placing my participants in. As Fontana and Frey (1998) noted, the interviewer “must be able to put him- or herself in the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their perspective” (p. 60). Cole and Knowles (2001) maintain “The more we understand ourselves as researchers, the better able we are to listen to and understand others” (p. 52). Similarly, Seidman (1991) stated that the purpose of a practice project is that it “should alert you to how the way you are as a person affects your interviewing” (p. 20). Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin (1998) asserted, “in personal experience methods we must acknowledge the centrality of the researchers’ own experience: their own tellings, livings, relivings, and retellings” (p. 161). Thus, they suggest that researchers use their own narratives of experiences as starting points. By personally experiencing the guiding questions from the perspective of a participant prior to interviewing the four participating museum educators, I became familiar with my own reactions to the questions, enabling me to pose these questions to participants in an empathic way. Furthermore, as Goodson and Sikes have suggested, “researchers are advised to share their own experiences and perceptions” (p. 28) during life history

interviews to establish connections with participants. Seidman (1991) also noted that sharing personal connections with participants “may encourage the participant to continue reconstructing his or her own in a more inner voice than before” (p. 66). By experiencing the interview process myself prior to engaging with my participants, I became familiar with the critical events in my life as a museum educator and researcher. I was able to share parts of my answers with participants, when appropriate, exposing the role of my own experiences in this research, supporting the dialogic nature of life history interviews, and encouraging a relationship based on trust between the participants and myself.

Each participant and I negotiated a time and place to meet for our first life history interview. I left the site choice entirely up to the participants, and encouraged them to choose a setting that was physically and emotionally comfortable and convenient for them, and that was relatively quiet, as recommended by Cole and Knowles (2001). According to Seidman (1991), the consideration of time, dates, and locations of interviews must be grounded upon equity. He stated: “The participants are giving the interviewers something they want. The interviewers must be flexible enough to accommodate the participants’ choice of location, time and date” (p. 40). Likewise, Yow (2005) insisted that interviews should be scheduled at the participant’s convenience as much as possible. Three of the four participants chose to hold the first interviews in their homes. Two of these participants asked for the second interview to be in their homes once again, and one requested that we meet at her place of work. One of the participants requested that we meet for both interviews in a coffee shop close to the museum where he

worked. Thus, the locations varied, speaking to the participants' idiosyncratic desires. The interviews were all conducted between February and July of 2010.

As Yow (2005) has noted, "Every first interview begins with uncertainty on the part of the interviewer and the narrator" (p. 96). The beginning of each life history interview that I conducted for this project consisted of an informal, open chat, where the participant and I either started a process of becoming better acquainted with each other or of getting "caught up" on our lives, prior to starting the recording. These initial ten minutes or so gave us an opportunity to share information "not necessarily related to education" (Szabad-Smyth, 2002, p. 43). We often engaged in conversation over tea, coffee, juice, or water. Szabad-Smyth (2002) noted that these rituals help relieve "some tension and to establish rapport between strangers" (p. 43). There was often laughter and genuine curiosity during these dialogues. These pre-interview sessions gave me an opportunity to set the nonhierarchical tone of the interview by sharing my own personal identity with the participants in open ways.

The first set of life history interviews focused on the participants' personal experiences outside of their professions, which had impacted them as museum educators. A 1987 case study on the socialization of pre-service teachers by Crow revealed that "remembered childhood experiences about learning and family activities and family role models" (Knowles, 1992, p. 106) and "role models, especially positive ones, provided by "remembrances of previous teachers" (p. 106) were two primary sources of teachers' views of themselves as teachers—their identities. It is my contention that the same is true for museum educators. Thus, the questions concentrated on eliciting reflections on childhood experiences with museums and art in general, more recent experiences of this

nature, and role models that had influenced each participant. I included a small number of open-ended, broad questions to “yield rich results” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 73). The questions followed a loose chronological structure, starting with early experiences and leading to more current or present influences. However, depending on how the interview was progressing, questions that showed up later in the sequence were sometimes moved up in the interview to comply with the flow of the conversation. The questions were designed to prompt the participants to share narratives relating to the covered topics (see Appendix D).

When the first life history interview was completed, I invited the participants to develop a timeline outlining the educational and professional experiences that had led them to their current positions, along with any relevant experiences outside of these areas, for our next meeting. As Connelly and Clandinin (1998) noted, the inclusion of annals, “a line schematic of an individual’s life divided into moments or segments by events, years, places or significant memories” (p. 163), enables both researchers and participants to “gain a sense of the whole of an individual’s life from his or her point of view” (p. 163). These authors often ask their participants to create annals and chronicles “as a way to scaffold their oral histories, of beginning the process of having them re-collect their experiences” (p. 164). Likewise, Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted that a timeline “is useful in prompting memories and concentrating attention” (p. 30). In a similar way, I asked my participants to develop annals to stimulate fruitful discussions about their educational and professional experiences in the second life history interview, which focused on the participating museum educators’ professional experiences.

There was a minimum of one month in between the two research meetings, giving the participants ample time to digest what occurred in the first life history interview and to develop their annals. The guiding questions for the second life history interview, which were also broad and open-ended, were sent to the participants approximately one week prior to our meeting. In the above-mentioned case study, Crow also noted that teachers' perspectives on their identities included "previous teaching experiences" (Knowles, 1992, p. 106). I believe that museum educators' identities, and thus their practice, are also highly influenced by their past professional and educational experiences. Thus, the questions for the second interview focused on the professional lived experiences of the participating museum educators (see Appendix D).

The interviews were between fifty-four and one hundred twenty-four minutes long, averaging close to ninety minutes, which is what several authors have defined as the ideal length of a qualitative research interview (Elliott, 2005, p. 32). These interviews were recorded using a digital recording device, and then promptly uploaded to the hard drive on my home computer. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) have pointed out, life history interviewing requires a high level of concentration on the part of the researcher, and thus in order to be able to pick up on "clues and hints about what might be a productive line of inquiry" (p. 32), life history researchers typically choose to use recording devices rather than relying on note taking alone. I personally transcribed the interviews on my computer. As Cole and Knowles remarked, "Such close listening is important because intent and meaning are conveyed as much through how things are said as through the actual words that are used" (p. 33). The biographical data forms and annals were collected from the participants and kept in my home office, for use during the analysis.

I used an ongoing reflexive journal to examine and reflect upon the components involved in this thesis. Prior to each life history interview, I examined my perceptions, biases, and expectations relating to participants and the upcoming interview process. After each interview, I reflected on the experience and examined questions and issues that emerged. Likewise, throughout the analysis and development of conclusions, I made entries into this journal. As Cole and Knowles (2001) noted, “The reflexive journal is the venue to record wide-ranging responses to the conversation and the circumstances surrounding it, comments on the inquiry process along with preliminary analyses or attempting to make sense of the event.” (p. 77). In this journal, I was able to acknowledge and monitor my own subjectivity throughout the research process (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

The above-mentioned procedures guided my participants and me on an exploration of our identities as museum educators. Each action brought me increasingly closer to understanding our stories and to developing interconnections between each of our lives. The variety of types of data collected—interviews, annals, and journals containing documents, reflections, and visual forms of analysis—allowed for triangulation, and thus enabled contextual understandings to evolve. The steps led to the development of a rich collection of data that exhibited depth and a substantial potential for interconnections to be made in the analysis processes.

Analyzing, Interpreting, and Representing the Data

The process of transcription can be seen as the starting point for analysis. As Elliott has pointed out, “rather than understanding the transcription process as occurring prior to analysis it is more appropriate to understand it as part of the analytic process”

(2005, p. 51). Kohler Riessman (2002) noted that an audio recording cannot capture a conversation in its entirety. The researcher makes choices when attempting to capture additional meaning expressed by the participant through “intonation, pauses, rhythm, hesitation, and body language” (p. 51). She has aptly stated that “Transcribing discourse, like photographing reality, is an interpretive practice” (p. 226). Because I was aware of this, I carefully listened to each interview and attempted to highlight additional meaning when possible, trying to retain and capture the essences and feelings connected with the interviews that I felt were important in examining the questions posed in this research project. As I completed transcribing each interview, I sent the transcript to the respective participant for review. All participants chose to make alterations to their texts. A number of small typos were corrected and many participants attempted to “clean up” the transcripts. On differing levels, they tried to tidy up their speech. Some removed pauses, introduced proper syntax and punctuation, and removed some of the “messy features of everyday speech” (Kohler Riessman, 2002, p. 51). I allowed the participants to make these changes by highlighting their alterations. In this way, I could use their altered texts, but could also review the original untidy transcripts I had developed if necessary.

In further analyzing these texts, I chose to use what Denzin (1989) has termed an “*interpretive framework*” (p. 49), which, unlike the “*objective framework*” (p. 49), rejects norms of “validity, reliability, truth, falsity, bias, data, hypothesis, theory, case, representativeness, and generalizability” (p. 49). Instead, with the interpretive framework, biographical data are examined “from within a literary fictional framework” (p. 49). In this approach, interview texts are carefully read and “Narrative segments and categories within the interview-story are isolated” (p. 56). Patterns relating to meaning and

experience are looked for, “the individual’s biography is reconstructed, and the structural-objective factors that have shaped his or her life are identified” (p. 56).

I aimed to arrive at a better understanding of each participant’s life, reconstructing their lives through my own interpretive lens. Denzin (1989) refers to this approach as “making sense of an individual’s life” (p. 59). In doing this, I became what Denzin (2004) has termed a “field-worker-as-*bricoleur*” (p. 447); I deconstructed the transcriptions to better understand the participants, then pieced together their stories in a “body of textual work that communicates these understandings to the reader” (p. 447). This coincides with Cole and Knowles’ (2001) approach to life history research, which they have articulated as follows: “in our commitment to ensure a central role for the participants’ voice, we do not muffle our own” (p. 114). They go on to state that “no matter how authentic our portrayal, it is *our* portrayal” (p. 117). This reality was further emphasized by applying the same analysis procedures to my own life history as I used on the other four participants.

Cole and Knowles (2001) noted that when “researchers live with information gathered and give ample time for reflexive and reflective examinations of it, the network of themes and patterns in a life become evident” (p. 112). They emphasized the need for multiple readings to be able to engage with the texts with “increasingly penetrating lenses” (p. 116). As we attempt to make sense of our participants’ lives, life history researchers search for and decide upon “root metaphors, life-defining themes, central truths, or epiphanies that can provide an organizing construct for a participant’s life” (p. 120). Denzin (2004) asserts that this interpretation process can only happen through doing—through going through the data and writing the interpretive text.

I started this process by examining the general topics around which I had grouped the questions from the two interviews. I realized that in developing these topics I had, in a sense, already initiated the process of coding. Boeije (2010) noted that this phenomenon can occur when researchers organize their interviews around themes in the form of questions that successfully pull out what they were looking for. The following is a list of the themes connected to each of my interview questions:

- Focusing on the personal
 - Positive early museum experiences
 - Frequency of early museum experiences
 - Recent positive museum experiences
 - Recent negative museum visits
 - Life mentors

- Focusing on the professional
 - Personal and professional history
 - Highlights
 - Challenges
 - Museum educator-museum visitor relationships
 - Relationships between museum educators
 - Museum educator-museum curator relationships
 - Curatorial design and museum education
 - Role of the museum educator
 - Training
 - Place for life history research in the museum education profession

I read Daniel's transcribed interviews, as he had the most in-depth responses. In reading and rereading these texts, I examined how Daniel's responses fit into these general themes. I quickly realized that I needed to break some of them down further and combine others. In other words, some of the themes were too broad to act as codes, while others were not broad enough. I needed to find more appropriate categories for organizing the data, leading to the process of coding. As Plummer (2001) has noted, life history researchers are often confronted with "masses and masses of 'data'" (p. 149). To ground myself in this potentially daunting process, I examined a number of life history

theses. I was most drawn to Dr. Linda Szabad-Smyth's (2002) approach to isolating codes and assigning colors to them. After reviewing Szabad-Smyth's work, I reexamined Daniel's transcripts. I noted that the two primary categories—the personal and the professional—were still very relevant. The following subcategories emerged and were assigned the specified colors for coding purposes:

Personal Experiences

- Early museum experiences (coded purple)
- Early out-of-museum art experiences (coded yellow)
- Recent museum experiences (coded orange)

Professional Experiences

- Museum educator preparation (coded pink)
- Professional highlights and challenges (coded green)
- Professional relationships (coded blue)
- Museum educator roles and education (coded red)

These codes were well suited for organizing my data in a way that would provide insight into my research questions through analytic interpretations. As Boeije (2010) has noted, this process of attributing codes takes the text beyond concrete data and into analytic interpretation. Taking this further, I began to highlight the texts, attributing the associated color coding system to the statements I considered to provide insight into the research inquiry. van Manen (1990) refers to this as the “selective or highlighting approach” (p. 93). In this approach, researchers examine the texts a number of times to highlight the statements or phrases that appear to be “particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described” (p. 93). After isolating these essential statements through my coding system, I reread the coded transcripts to find themes that would highlight the essence of each individual's experience. Once again inspired by Szabad-Smyth's (2002) doctoral work, I studied the highlighted sections in a holistic manner, searching for one or more meaningful statements that could shed light on the

individual's experience with each theme. In regard to this sententious or holistic approach, van Manen asks, "What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?" (p. 93). These essential statements added further meaning to the main codes that I had isolated, acting as subcodes. van Manen (1990) explained that by pulling out these statements researchers can capture "the main thrust of the meaning of the themes" (p. 93). For example, when I read Daniel's description of his early experiences in museums, the phrase that stood out as giving meaning to his experience was "that really knocked me out". I examined each transcript in this way in order to pull out thematic statements in my participants' words so I could organize and shed light on the data that had been gleaned.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, the experiences of each participant were cross-analyzed. Recurring patterns were highlighted and comparisons were made. I pulled out common themes in the educators' stories and analyzed these patterns, locating them within the wider context of museum education by layering connected literature into the discussion. In this way, the cross-case analysis connected these museum educators' life histories to the broader sociohistorical context (Goodson, 1981; Goodson & Gill, 2011). By creating a dialogue among these different educators' experiences and between their experiences and the broader concerns evidenced in museum literature, the cross-case analysis helped to make sense of these stories as they pertain to the current context of museum education. As Cole and Knowles (2001) point out, in the interpretation and analysis of data, the life history researcher "has the capacity to stand back and, through a wide-angle interpretive lens, consider the meanings revealed. In so doing she offers a broader and more contextualized interpretation" (p. 117). It must be noted that this process did not offer up

generalizations for the field of museum education. Rather, it provided in-depth insight into these five museum educators' experiences and identities. By placing their stories within the context of museum educational discourse, we contribute to our understanding of the field. In the concluding chapter, this knowledge is summarized and insight into how it could inform the education and professional development of museum educators is examined.

This dissertation examined these museum educators' lives in depth. Their beliefs, values, attitudes, and chosen practices, and the origins of all of these were revealed and placed within the larger sociohistorical context. The research processes were grounded in collaboration and empathic relationships, revealing rich stories. The following five chapters showcase the life journeys of each participant through these rich stories. Their personal experiences as museum visitors and creators of art and their professional experiences as museum educators are highlighted. Each character study revealed substantial insight into these practitioners' identities, as expressed through their narratives.

Chapter Four

Character Study: Daniel

Opening Biography

Daniel was born in Toronto, Ontario, in 1968. He grew up as the youngest of three children. Daniel refers to his mother as being interested in art, while his father was not. According to Daniel, on his mother's side of the family, "art was something that people were interested in, and it was sort of valued" (Daniel, transcription, p. 25). He regularly visited the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) with his family from the mid to late 1970s. He stated that, throughout his childhood and until he left home, he "was pretty familiar with the AGO and went a fair bit" (Daniel, transcription, p. 3). He believes he went to museums twice a year with his family during his childhood and adolescence. His grandmother on his mother's side instigated the vast majority of the experiences Daniel had at this gallery. Daniel describes his grandmother as an amateur watercolor painter. He noted that he would not have had such profound early childhood experiences with art if his grandmother had not been someone who enjoyed viewing art in museums and thought that her young grandson would also find this type of experience interesting.

Daniel started school in Etobicoke in 1973 and entered an advancement program in 1976. He and his family moved to Palgrave, Ontario, in 1978, where he finished his elementary schooling. As a result of living in this small town in Ontario, he refers to himself as once being a "country kid". In 1979, Daniel started high school in Bolton, which is about ten minutes away from Palgrave. He chose to study art as an elective throughout high school. He had a particularly influential art teacher, whom he describes as a great teacher who stimulated him and provided him with opportunities where his art-

making and art appreciating could thrive. She was a demanding and caring teacher, who inspired Daniel to seek further education in the visual arts after he completed high school.

Thus, in 1986, Daniel began a four-year Honors Visual Arts degree at the University of Western Ontario, in London, Ontario. While still working on his degree, Daniel taught photography at a summer day camp in Toronto. He graduated from university in May 1990, and immediately began working as an assistant at a small gallery in Toronto. During that same summer, Daniel completed a six-week French immersion program in Trois-Pistoles, Quebec. After working as a general gallery assistant for one year, he realized that this was not a career that he wanted to pursue forever. He said that he “weighed [his] options and decided to go into education” (Daniel, transcription, p. 25).

In August 1991, Daniel moved to Montreal, Quebec, and began a one-year graduate diploma in Education in the Arts at McGill University. When reflecting on his teacher-education program, he stated “I really wasn’t at all convinced that I wanted to be a teacher, especially in a school setting” (Daniel, transcription, p. 25).

Dissatisfied with his experiences in the high school system, Daniel began to look into alternative spaces where he could teach art. As it turned out, a local museum was hiring and offered him employment. Thus, Daniel began working as an educator at a museum in a city in the province of Quebec in 1992. He graduated from McGill in 1992 as well, and decided to continue to work at the museum as an educator, working directly with the public.

In January 1999, Daniel began working on a series of special projects at the museum. These projects included exhibition production and multimedia activity design.

In September of the same year, Daniel began teaching courses in museum pedagogy to volunteer guides at the museum.

The position Daniel acquired at this museum had a flexible schedule—some weeks he worked on a part-time basis, and other weeks he was engaged in more full-time work. This flexibility enabled Daniel to maintain a very dedicated studio practice in painting and drawing, which is his primary concern. He has exhibited his work extensively in Quebec, Ontario, and the United States. His work is also part of public collections in a number of institutions in Quebec and Ontario and private collections in Canada, the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands.

Personal Experiences

Early Museum Experiences

It really knocked me out

Daniel's early memories of museum experiences are concentrated around the Art Gallery of Ontario. His grandmother most often accompanied him during these visits. He occasionally refers to his grandfather being there, happy to tag along, as well as Daniel's siblings. At the beginning of our interview, Daniel was eager to share a narrative of his most memorable early experience in an art museum. This experience occurred at the AGO's *Van Gogh and the Birth of Cloisonnism* exhibition in 1981. He described the event as being particularly profound:

That really knocked me out. That was incredible, that exhibition... I remember walking around, and I remember noticing that the people seemed so interested and so impressed. And I thought that was interesting. What is it about these paintings that is affecting them so much? And then I was looking at the paintings myself, thinking, it is true that they are really cool and that they are beautiful—the colors are beautiful, and all the interesting brushstrokes. (Daniel, transcription, p. 2)

Daniel also referred to being especially struck by the fact that one person, Van Gogh, had painted so many works.

Daniel also described a second exhibition at the AGO that left a lasting impression on him: the *Treasures of Tutankhamen* in 1979. He said how impressed he was by the work that some, often unknown, individual had created thousands of years ago. He described the sense of appreciation he had, and continues to have, for art objects that have endured over time. He reminisced about an object in the permanent collection at his current place of employment that evokes similar feelings to the ones he had as a young child at the *Treasures of Tutankhamen* exhibition:

There is this little clay pot in the Egyptian collection, here at the museum. It has a beautiful little decorative pattern on it...It was done around *six thousand* years ago. I am thinking, some guy, or some woman, it didn't take them long to do, they did it in an afternoon kind of a thing. So, for several hours one day, they made this pot six thousand years ago, and here it is! That same object survived until now!
(Daniel, transcription, p. 2)

Daniel referred to a sense of awe that he felt as a result of seeing these original, particularly historic objects. He stated "I was thinking, my god, this is the real stuff from all that time ago. Impressive" (Daniel, transcription, p. 2).

Discovering things on my own

Daniel made it clear that his early experiences at the AGO were not adult-centered. His grandparents did not direct his visits or control where he went. On the contrary, he was encouraged to wander the galleries and focus on the artworks he was attracted to. His grandparents would also ask him to share his experiences with them, which encouraged an obvious social learning environment:

I don't have one single recollection of her [my grandmother] speechifying to me. No, we went and the example she gave was just somebody who was enamored with interesting art. I remember nine times out of ten going on my own. I mean, I

was with her at the exhibition, but we might not be in the same room, and I was kind of discovering things on my own...(Daniel, transcription, p. 32)

Both early art museum experiences described by Daniel demonstrate his early curiosity and sense of amazement in relation to art viewing experiences. He recalled his early museum experiences as being instigated by his grandmother, yet he felt a great sense of freedom in these art spaces. In his early meanderings around gallery spaces, Daniel was pulled towards certain art collections through their aesthetic power, the dedication of their creators, and their ability to withstand time.

Early Out-of-Museum Art Experiences

A magic workshop

Daniel opted to take art class throughout his high school years, as he was very interested in the domain. He referred to a proactive art teacher who made a point of organizing two art outings for her students each year. These were often museum experiences, primarily at the AGO. Daniel stated that during these trips, he “didn’t feel like an outsider” (Daniel, transcription, p. 3) because he had already been to the gallery so many times with his grandmother. Because of his positive experiences with his grandmother, he felt that museum spaces were not exclusive institutions. He felt comfortable accessing them—he felt that he belonged there.

Daniel also recalled visiting art spaces that were not part of a museum. One important experience was when he was in grade eleven or twelve. His art teacher took her students to a practicing artist’s studio in Toronto. He recalled this experience as being quite divergent from what he was used to in the country. To Daniel, this artist seemed to be so different—“a real ex-hippie stoner, trippy guy” (Daniel, transcription, p. 6)—and

left a lasting impression on him. However, it was the studio space that most impressed

Daniel:

The thing that really impressed me was to see a functioning studio. It was a combination of clutter and order and tools and materials, and that, that I got a kick out of. Really...it is like a magic workshop. At its best, that is what I think it really ought to be...[it is where] interesting, unexpected things happen. And, sometimes people make wonderful things in those spaces. It's a special kind of space, that is true. And, I got that from this experience in high school. It made me want to kind of be part of that world. (Daniel, transcription, pp. 6-7)

Daniel referred to this visit as being a turning point for him—an epiphany. Upon seeing this artist in his space, Daniel declared, “I want to be a part of that world someday” (Daniel, transcription, p. 7). He related this experience to his first experience with the work of Van Gogh: “...to see somebody who was doing something actually in the present that was comparable to what Van Gogh did one hundred years ago, the space and the activity of creating art really struck me” (Daniel, transcription, p. 7).

Daniel described a non-art-related field trip to the Toronto Stock Exchange to highlight how he was far more affected by the visit to the art studio:

It was a real spectacle, because it was all these guys, you know making signs to each other. It was a real stock-trading floor with screaming people, and people writing numbers on pieces of paper, throwing them, and buying and selling. And, it's a cool building, an Art Deco building. That affected me too. That was a really incredible spectacle. Just, it didn't have the same effect on me as seeing that guy's studio...And, it is not like seeing the trading floor or the stock market wasn't magical. It was. It was this incredible theatre. But, I mean, maybe there were some kids in the class that thought, oh that is going to be me in twenty years, but I wasn't one of them. (Daniel, transcription, p. 7)

Thus, Daniel acknowledged that the experience in the artist's studio may not have made as strong an impact on other students. He recognized the profound effect this experience made on him, which may have been influenced by his early experiences with viewing art with his grandmother.

Recent Museum Experiences

This is real and it is valuable

Daniel described a positive recent museum experience that he had at the Art Institute of Chicago in the summer of 2009. He visited the art museum with his brother during a three-day trip to Chicago. Daniel first visited the extensive collection of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art that the Art Institute is known for. He described the collection as impressive, containing very well-known works of art. Daniel enjoyed wandering around this famous collection, but what struck him the most was the new section of the Art Institute. Coming upon this section was a surprise and he considered it to be a powerful experience. He recalled being confronted with the new wing that was developed for the contemporary collection. Daniel described this structure as a “very elegant glass and steel wing of the building” (Daniel, transcription, p. 8). As he roamed around this new section, Daniel was expecting to be confronted with the museum’s general contemporary collection, which he thought would be a pleasant experience. Instead, he was astonished to be greeted by a special exhibition of Cy Twombly—an artist he was already interested in. Daniel was familiar with Twombly’s graphite works and was anticipating these. He was shocked to be presented with something very different:

...so I thought, oh Cy Twombly, let’s go take a look at these pencil pictures. So, I went in, and it wasn’t at all what I was expecting. He more recently has done some very colorful, a couple of different series of works on paper and sculpture, and there are very bright colors and very gestural. I thought, well this isn’t it at all. I didn’t know how to take it. And then in the next room, there were these gigantic canvases that were basically very, very loose paintings of flowers. Gigantic peonies...there was *so* much life in the paintings. The brushwork, the way the color was applied, and the freedom of it. They are *great!* And so many of them. (Daniel, transcription, p. 9)

What was most affecting about these works for Daniel was how beautiful and simple he found them to be:

...they were *beautiful!* Just these big lyrical paintings. I think what really got me was the beauty of the works, and the sort of uncomplicated, unpretentious aspect to the work. He saw beauty in these flowers and in spite of the fact that painting a picture of a flower, give me a break, but he went ahead and did it, and he did it in such an honest, so authentic, really beautiful way. So, I think that whole experience, of the beauty of the work, not just the aesthetic beauty, but all the other beauty in it. (Daniel, transcription, p. 9)

Daniel also referred to the element of surprise as an important factor in this positive museum experience:

You know, you are sort of bumming around a foreign city, and you stumble on this really powerful experience. And, it is the museum that offered it...maybe having ran through the permanent collection first, and kind of knowing what to expect and then being blown away by it, this whole Cy Twombly thing at the end was just an afterthought. I wasn't expecting to really look at anymore art that day. And then, the most powerful thing happened. (Daniel, transcription, p. 10)

Finally, Daniel was impacted by Twombly's approach to making these paintings:

It felt like, you know, you were seeing something that some individual did in a fearless, really authentic way. It was inspiring. Not just in terms of art-making, but in terms of how you approach everything. It was nice to see somebody so fearless. (Daniel, transcription, p. 10)

Daniel was impressed with Twombly's ability to take risks and to remain authentic in his creations. He clearly connected to Twombly's approach not just in relation to making art, but also to approaching life. Daniel was so impressed with this work that he felt compelled to find his brother in the museum and to bring him through the exhibition. He too was amazed by the work.

The second recent positive art museum experience that Daniel shared was centered on a family trip to Paris, a couple of years before our interview. He particularly noted some experiences he had with his father at the Louvre. Daniel described his father

as being “less connected or less interested in art” (Daniel, transcription, p. 11) than his mother, who was naturally interested in these museum experiences. During their visit to the Louvre, the family walked into the room containing Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa*. Daniel’s father showed an interest in this work, asking, “what happened to those guys?” (Daniel, transcription, p. 11). Daniel then put on his museum educator hat and provided his father with art historical information related to the painting. He noted that his father was connecting with the information, which Daniel found exciting. He stated, “I could see the light bulb going on in his head that way it often goes on with people who I work with” (Daniel, transcription, p. 11).

Daniel felt that this was the first time that his father truly saw what he did for a living and began to understand the nature and importance of his work: “...it is almost twenty years that I have been doing this...that I work in a museum, but I think it was the first time that he had actually seen what it is that I actually do—that I look at art with people” (Daniel, transcription, p. 11). He went on to express how his family members were particularly impressed with his ability to describe artworks and engage them with these works: “They looked at me like, ‘you’re really good at explaining this stuff!’” (Daniel, transcription, p. 11).

Daniel inferred that the importance of these two recent experiences lies in how they shed light on the significance of his work as a museum educator:

I guess the two experiences, the one in Chicago and the one in Paris, kind of reinforced my sense of the value of what I do at the [museum]. On the one hand, the one in Chicago was me, on my own, receiving something powerful from the work. In the other case, it was helping somebody else discover something powerful in the work, which is more what my job is at the museum. So, I would say that each of them were reminders of the significance and the value of what I do. I wouldn’t say that they changed my educational philosophy or anything, but

it reinforced it. It reminded me that this is real and it is valuable. (Daniel, transcription, p. 13)

Thus, Daniel's memories of recent positive museum experiences were individual and social events while on vacation. They were filled with surprise and excitement. These experiences were valuable in that they reinforced his belief that museum education is powerful, real, and important.

There is a certain experience that is imposed on you

Daniel rarely has negative museum experiences. The negative experiences that he has come across were related to exhibition design that diverged from what he would like to experience and/or physical discomfort. Daniel offered a recent experience he encountered at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) as an example of exhibition design that he considered to be very poor. Daniel visited the ROM to see the *Dead Sea Scrolls: Words that Changed the World* exhibition in December 2009. He was interested in seeing these impressive historical artifacts, but was incredibly disappointed by the design of the show:

...the whole thing was in taupe and beige, which is normal, I guess, because it was the desert type area that they were referring to, where they were found. They could have arranged it so it was a little bit more engaging. I mean. I don't mind going to a museum where the walls are white or beige or whatever, but in this case, the actual objects that the exhibition was about were few and small and fragmentary, and the whole entire exhibition was didactic panels in a taupe on a beige wall. It drove you nuts. A, there was way too much stuff to read, and B, you could hardly read it because the colors were killing you. (Daniel, transcription, pp. 13-14)

Daniel found that the blatantly didactic nature of the exhibit overpowered his experience with the actual artifacts: "The way the work is displayed can break it for me" (Daniel, transcription, p. 16). He elaborated on this concept by stating that this occurs "when the designer of the exhibition considers the work to be secondary, like the actual work of art

is the exhibition sometimes” (Daniel, transcription, p. 16). In these cases, Daniel feels that a great focus is placed on “how the walls are arranged and painted, and all this extra stuff, to create an environment for the work, so the show itself is the art” (Daniel, transcription, p. 16).

When describing his experience at the ROM, Daniel also referred to the physical discomfort that he felt:

...usually, if I have a negative experience in a museum, it is because there is something about, I get the same thing in shopping malls, but I hate shopping malls, but there is something about being in that kind of environment, I mean the atmosphere, like literally, the air, that tires me out. After an hour walking in a museum I can hardly stand, I need to take a nap. I don't know, it is like the small of my back gets sore, there is no place to sit, you are cricking your neck this way and that to see what is in front of you. It is the physical, the way your physical movement is directed. There is a certain experience that is imposed on you by the people in the galleries. (Daniel, transcription, p. 14)

He also observed that visiting a museum is “supposed to be an important experience. Or, you are supposed to be having an enjoyable time” (Daniel, transcription, p. 14). When this does not happen due to physical discomfort or overpowering exhibition design, the possibility of his expectations being met recedes further and further away for Daniel.

Professional Experiences

Museum Educator Preparation

Proactive and demanding

Daniel's high school art teacher left a lasting impression on him and influenced the direction of his studies and, ultimately, his career: “...she was a great teacher and we got along very well. So, after I finished high school I went on to study art, obviously” (Daniel, transcription, p. 20). Daniel described her as an influential teacher, who nurtured his interest in art:

...I obviously took the art classes because I was interested in it. I didn't have any natural talent for drawing or anything like that. But I enjoyed doing it. And I enjoyed learning about art history and all that... a kid with those sorts of interests can take art at school, and if it is a bad or average teacher, then they can develop or get left out. But in my case, it certainly, at least in part is thanks to this teacher, that it really blossomed, my interest in it. (Daniel, transcription, p. 19)

Daniel appreciated this teacher's dedication to organizing intriguing art field trips. He referred to this art teacher as being particularly "proactive" in this area. Additionally, he noted that his teacher encouraged critical thinking and the theorization of art—ensuring that the art class was a place for active and meaningful creation and discussion. In this sense, Daniel noted that his teacher enabled his interest and skills in the arts to "blossom" by setting high standards for her students:

...a lot of kids took art in high school thinking it was a bird course. And, they were sorely surprised that it wasn't just, you know, drawing a bunch of flowers in a vase or whatever. There was that. The making of art was certainly part of the program, but there was also art history, discussion...*(and)* critical thinking, really! ...the idea that art is a kind of invented language that you can learn to understand, that was certainly worked on and developed through this great teacher. I think she really believed that and was able to help us learn it. So, she was a pretty big influence, I would have to say. (Daniel, transcription, p. 19)

Her dedication and demanding standards also positively affected how Daniel performed outside of the art classroom:

...she was a demanding person, and honestly, if I left high school with an ability to string a sentence together, it wasn't because of learning grammar in English classes, because we wrote essays for art history and she was picky about structure and reasoning out your argument and all that. If I learned to write and think clearly in high school it is thanks to her. (Daniel, transcription, p. 19)

Daniel noted how advanced she was in treating the curriculum in a cross-curricular way:

"I think in high school curricula now, they talk about cross-curricular programming, but I don't think they were consciously doing it back then. But she was doing it in spite of herself, or on purpose" (Daniel, transcription, p. 20).

Daniel was so inspired by and grateful to his teacher that he invited her to an exhibition of some of his recent artwork, which she attended. It had been twenty years since their last face-to-face meeting, though they had never completely lost touch. Daniel enjoyed seeing his influential teacher two decades after his last class with her, and he believes that she was happy to “see one of her students from years past had gone on in the field and had done something interesting” (Daniel, transcription, p. 20).

Just stumbled into it

Daniel noted that he “kind of just stumbled into” the museum education profession (Daniel, transcription, p. 20). A series of seemingly serendipitous events guided him towards a career in museum education. After finishing his undergraduate degree at the University of Western Ontario in London, Daniel began to contemplate working in education. Around the same time, he met a woman who lived in Montreal and decided to move to be with her. He began a one-year teacher certification program at McGill University. He recognized that, right from the beginning of this program, he had reservations about dedicating his career to teaching in school:

...I came to do this one-year program at McGill and even while it was beginning, I remember thinking, I don't know, I am not sure I want to teach...I was really hot and cold about the idea, I had just moved down here and I thought, well if I am going to go through with this and teach, let me think where I would enjoy teaching, because I don't think I am built to teach in high school. (Daniel, transcription, p. 21)

Daniel also became disheartened with the way that the arts were represented in the school-system when he and his classmates started their internships in elementary and high schools. According to him, many of the teachers that were in charge of teaching art in the schools he and his classmates were working with were not passionate about the domain:

I mean the people who were actually teaching art in high school didn't know a thing about it. Seriously...it was like biology teachers who had been teaching biology for twenty years, and then the budget gets cut and the principal says you can do *arts plastiques* [fine arts] next year or else take an early retirement. So, they keep teaching. They read a book over the summer and figure out how they are going to do it. (Daniel, transcription, p. 27)

Daniel described a rather disappointing art education internship he engaged in at a high school in Montreal:

I showed up and the very first day, the person that was teaching art said to me: "Oh, thank god you are here, somebody who knows what they are talking about. Here kids, I'm going for coffee. See you in six weeks." She popped in a couple of times over the six weeks. I learned nothing. She wasn't even there. She was a biology teacher. (Daniel, transcription, p. 27)

In his frustration and uncertainty about his desire to teach at the high school level, Daniel began to look for alternative education-related positions:

Anyway, so, I looked around, I knew that the [museum where he works] existed...and I looked up a couple of other places. And, I thought, well I am going to send letters off to these places just to see if you are looking for people to volunteer in your education department, I just wanted to kind of get my feet wet, get a feel for it. And, unbeknownst to me...the education department was growing. So, when they got my letter, they called me up and said we're not looking for volunteer help, but we are actually hiring, and would you like to come in for an interview. Anyway, I got hired, out of the blue, total fluke. But lo and behold, I really liked it. (Daniel, transcription, p. 21)

Although Daniel was obviously uncertain about whether or not he would be happy pursuing a career in education and was discouraged by his experiences in the school system while working on his teaching degree, he decided to continue in the field of education, yet chose an alternative institution to be affiliated with—the art museum. This was a perfect solution. He was able to work within the realm of education and particularly with art. He noted that in the museum “there is more of a critical mass of focused art going on” (Daniel, transcription, p. 27) than in high schools. He observed that his colleagues at the art museum are inspirational and that many of them have reaffirmed

his belief that museum education is a worthwhile and valuable profession. This is distinctly different from his experiences in high schools during his teaching certification. Daniel's entry into the museum world came at the perfect time and turned out to be a superb fit for him.

Professional Highlights and Challenges

Their world becomes richer

Daniel noted that the most obvious highlight for him in his job is when he witnesses visitors experiencing epiphany moments during his guided visits and workshops. He emphasized that this occurs most often with groups of children, as they often have low expectations for their visits and are elated when they experience “aha” moments:

...there is a kind of thing that happens now and again that I really enjoy...when the light bulb goes off in somebody's head. Kids come to the museum, it is very often for the first time. Very often, they are thinking, “oh this is going to be a drag”. You know, you can see it in their faces when they show up. My approach is always to try, not to just deliver information...I prefer it to be much more kind of like, interactive and participatory. Get the kids, or the people, whoever they are, to, ask a few kind of lead in questions, get them to look at the work in a certain way, get them to think about it. But let them discover what there is to discover and explore the processes that you can use to facilitate that. And, sometimes you see people, like the penny drops. They just go, ah! They finally realize for the first time that a work of art is more than just decorative, or just a picture of something...that it actually connects to an idea...It is full of meaning, right? You see people getting that for the first time. And, then their world becomes richer. (Daniel, transcription, p. 28)

Daniel noted that this highlight becomes even more rewarding when the participants have learned these tools and can continue to use them in new museum experiences—fostering potentially positive future museum experiences without a museum educator:

...the cherry on top, you know, if I can help them understand that that process of discovering something in a work of art, they can do it when I am not there, they can do it on their own. They just have to trust their brains and eyes and their

intuition...to make them independent. So, it opens up a whole new world for people, it really does, of meaning and of interaction. That is a thrill when that happens. (Daniel, transcription, p. 28)

These epiphany moments are clearly motivational for Daniel. He spoke about encouraging such experiences several times during our meetings.

All kinds of crazy stuff happens

Daniel referred to the need to be flexible during his work. Often, quite unexpected events happen and he needs to respond quickly, appropriately, and effectively. He offered an example of how small changes in the museum require him to be very adaptable:

...it is a pretty big collection, sometimes they move things around, take something down, put a different one up. And, sometimes you show up and (*gasp*), the picture you were going to base your whole thing on, it is not there. So, you go, okay, come with me, we are going to look at something else. (Daniel, transcription, p. 31)

Daniel noted that, although this is challenging, it is not necessarily a negative aspect of his work:

...it's not exactly a challenge, the fact that there are constantly new exhibitions coming up, but that, you know, is a good thing. It is a challenge to constantly be on the ball with everything new all the time, but it is also good...You are constantly learning new things. (Daniel, transcription, p. 31)

This evolving environment provides variety, as Daniel has noted. This variety requires one to think on one's feet, but it also creates opportunities for learning and growth.

Professional Relationships

Active rather than just passive

Daniel aims to promote active, dialogue-based relationships between his visitors and himself. He believes that people retain more and learn more when they are active rather than passive participants:

I have always thought that it is more interesting for everybody if people are thinking and coming to their own conclusions. I mean I am there to help people through the process...I think I have always felt that it was better for everybody if people were active rather than passive. (Daniel, transcription, p. 32)

Furthermore, by promoting these active relationships, Daniel attempts to provide his visitors with tools they can use to create active future encounters with art. Thus, he aims to encourage independence:

I want the people to feel like they can be independent. I am full of things to talk about, but I really do make a point of inviting their participation, and how you go about discovering things on your own, looking at art—a work of art, or the greater world. How it relates to their own lives...(Daniel, transcription, p. 31)

Daniel also tries to break down the barriers between artworks and visitors: “To break down the isolation—the work as a fetishized thing on a wall or pedestal that you admire” (Daniel, transcription, p. 31). By removing the elitist auras around works of art, Daniel creates comfortable situations for his visitors to actively engage with art.

The transformation from beginning to end

Daniel noted that promoting active, dialogue-based relationships that aim to build independence results in greater opportunities for transformative learning to occur. He offered a touching anecdote to illustrate how such transformation can occur when visitors are encouraged to actively discover:

...there was one particular group that showed up and the kids were grumbly and not happy...there was this one kid who was quite disruptive, and sometimes my reaction when a kid is disruptive is to include him more in what is going on—to distract him...There was a big painting that looks nonrepresentational. But you see that it is also a portrait...the kid went through the whole experience of looking at the painting—me saying, you know, the “what’s this?” They were all going, “it’s just a stupid abstract painting with a bunch of colors, who cares?” He noticed [what it represented]. And, plus it was a cultural sporting reference that he connected to, so that was cool. And it just kind of changed. Once he saw that it is not just all emptiness, then he was much more interested in the next piece we were going to look at...and the whole rest of the process. And, at the end of it, he was, he was very emotional. He didn’t want to go. He became very attached.

Like, he must have had some kind of powerful experience that touched him somehow. And, I guess because he identified it with me, because I was the guy that was leading the group through the whole thing, when he was disruptive, I didn't yell at him, I just kind of like tried to finesse his concentration back on something else... Anyway, he was very emotional. He was tearing when it was time to go. (Daniel, transcription, pp. 32-33)

Because he was actively included in the situation, this young child was able to have a profound and emotional experience with art. Daniel was also affected by this experience.

Its transformative and emotional components stand out in his mind:

It was really one of those situations where you saw him...[thinking] "oh, okay, I get it!" So, that was memorable, because of the tears at the end! The transformation from beginning to end. It went from "get me the hell out of here, this place is a drag" to not wanting to leave. (Daniel, transcription, p. 22)

Daniel gave this student a comfortable situation to explore art, make discoveries about art, and relate the work to his own past experiences. These components led this student to an emotional and transformative experience that also clearly affected Daniel.

We are all friends

At the museum where Daniel works, the "on-the-floor" museum educators have developed a close-knit relationship:

...a very great, positive aspect to my job, is the team of people that are working there right now, they are incredible. I look forward to seeing them every day...we are all friends now, but they are also really, very capable professionals, smart, enriching people. It is incredible. (Daniel, transcription, p. 34)

Daniel noted that he and the educators that he works with take a participatory approach to their pedagogical endeavors. Thus, they all have a strong commonality in their teaching and learning philosophies: "I don't think there is anybody who doesn't do it more or less the way I do it" (Daniel, transcription, p. 40).

He described his relationship with the educators working in the office as somewhat more distant because the office workers are physically more removed from being on the floor and dealing with hands-on teaching:

The people in the office...there is less intense proximity. Over the years, there has been animosity between the office and the educators because, partly because of this structural issue of, they need something from us, and they can't guarantee the work, and that creates issues sometimes because people, you know, they declare that they are available but the truth is that they have to look some place else, because they have to! (Daniel, transcription, p. 34)

However, Daniel noted that, although there has been tension between the educators and educational office workers over the years, they are "in a good period now" (Daniel, transcription, p. 34).

Very helpful, very professional

At the museum where Daniel works, there is not a great deal of communication between the curators and the educators. However, since he has been working at the museum for so long, he has had a number of opportunities to collaborate with curators there. Daniel emphasized that he has "always had a good relationship with them" (Daniel, transcription, p. 35). To illustrate this, he referred to a pedagogically focused exhibition that he developed. He was required to work closely with the curatorial staff in order to get permission to include certain works in this exhibition:

...the project I was working on was to conceive an educationally oriented exhibition for blind and vision-impaired visitors. So, part of what I had to do for that was to meet with the curators and go over my ideas...I met with a bunch of them. And, they were very helpful, very professional. (Daniel, transcription, p. 35)

Though many educators at the museum where Daniel works may not have a great deal of communication with curators, Daniel has had the opportunity to develop positive relationships with them over the many years that he has been employed there. In this

example, the relationship seems to be one in which the curators were offering to help Daniel rather than Daniel providing assistance to them.

Here is our reality

Daniel offered a second example to illustrate the types of relationships that exist between curators and educators at his museum. Daniel recounted an incident where curatorial decisions affected his work as an educator. He described a time when one of the galleries was undergoing renovations, some of which posed problems for the education department's staff members:

...they had this design guy come in and design all of the furniture for the look of the gallery and all of the presentation cases and tables and stuff. And, his idea was to make them, like they would be reminiscent of icebergs, meaning jagged points all over the place at about eye height if you are seven years old...that was sort of the catalyst for the education department talking to the curatorial department. We said, here is our reality: when you do that kind of thing, you are begging for injury. We are going through there all the time with little kids and, in spite of how cool it looks, it is not safe and it is something to keep in mind in the future. For certain galleries, especially in a gallery like that where things are in glass cases or on tables, or presentation boxes...to consider the fact that quite a lot of the people who are coming to look at the work are four feet tall...(Daniel, transcription, p. 35)

The education department's meeting with the curators attempted to convey the realities of working with diverse audiences in the galleries. In this example, Daniel referred to safety issues and accessibility. He went on to explain that this meeting was a positive experience for both the educators and the curators: "...that became a really fruitful conversation that we had with the curatorial staff" (Daniel, transcription, p. 35). He noted that conversations like this prove that the education department at his museum has "mostly good relationships with the curators" (Daniel, transcription, p. 35).

At the same time, when asked if education is at the forefront of the workings at his museum, which the mandate suggests, Daniel stated, "I wouldn't say that it feels like

everyone in the museum is on our side” (Daniel, transcription, p. 37). Rather, there seems to be a general level of respect from the curators towards the work of the educators: “I think there is a general willingness to respect the work that we do and a recognition of it” (Daniel, transcription, p. 37). Daniel sees some promise of these relationships moving beyond mere acceptance, as the new head of the department is dedicated to informing other departments of the essential work being done by educators:

...a museum is a complicated place. Anyway, I think generally speaking, I think there is a lack of understanding. And, [for] our new *chef de service* [head of the department], that is a real priority of his—taking steps so that the rest of the museum departments and staff see what we do. To be able to recognize its value. (Daniel, transcription, p. 37)

According to Daniel, the lack of recognition of the value of museum education from other museum professionals can be attributed to a general lack of understanding of the work that museum educators do.

Museum Educator Roles and Education

Make it possible for everybody to go

Daniel views the education department as being charged with the task of making the museum more available to the entire community, which, as he noted, is the primary mandate of the museum where he works. According to Daniel, even though other museum professionals attempt to make the museum accessible to a variety of publics, many people do not feel comfortable venturing into museums. They feel this experience is not for them. This, according to Daniel, is where the museum educator must step in:

I think that the importance of the education department in the museum is primarily with respect to the museum’s mandate to make itself available to the entire community. That in spite of everything, there still is in the minds of some people in the community, public at large, that a museum, like the one I work in, is a snooty place, exclusive and you have to be, you know, an art person to go there or it is all sorts of snobby people who go there and it is not for most everyone.

And, it is really not true. It is a place where they can really be affected by the art. (Daniel, transcription, p. 37)

Daniel believes that the community outreach program at his museum creates great links between these hesitant publics and the museum:

...[the community outreach program]...is a very, very successful outreach program. I think it is a real feather in the cap of the education department. We are actively inviting people who might not otherwise come, to come! And, making it free for them. And giving them an opportunity to have an experience where they can discover that, “hey, this is for me and I can do it on my own next time.” (Daniel, transcription, p. 37)

For Daniel, this community outreach program epitomizes what he believes is the purpose of museum education departments: to make museums inviting and relevant to as many people as possible.

Bridges cultural gaps

Daniel asserted that, by reaching out to diverse publics, the museum can become a venue to bring multiple cultures together: “it certainly bridges cultural gaps” (Daniel, transcription, p. 14). This, in his view, can be achieved by employing artifacts from visitors’ countries of origin as starting points for discussion. He noted that this is particularly important for new immigrants or visitors from other countries:

If a person has just shown up from another part of the world, if we go into the collection that is part of their world, then that is a nice experience for them. And, it gets them talking because they want to say, “oh, this is a thing from my country.” (Daniel, transcription, p. 39)

Daniel also referred to the groups from French as a Second Language classes that come to the museum, who are primarily new immigrants to Canada. The museum offers a location to explore art in the new language they are acquiring in their new country. For Daniel, the museum is an ideal place for multicultural learning and exchange to evolve.

A foot on the floor

Daniel mentioned how important it is for educators to work “on the floor” with audience members and with the artworks on display. He mentioned that it is quite common for the behind-the-scenes, office-based educators to plan educational projects from their offices and spend little to no time with the actual public, due to their already demanding schedules:

I think it would be beneficial for everybody if those people maintained a closer connection to working in the galleries. Most everybody who is working in the office who are doing stuff related to our activities have experience working on the floor, but I have noticed that if you are in your office all day, you kind of forget, you lose contact with the work too, in the galleries. And, that’s where the good ideas come from, being around the work all of the time. (Daniel, transcription, p. 29)

For Daniel, hands-on work with publics and artifacts is essential for effective programming to evolve and for maintaining high levels of motivation in education staff.

One of the reasons that Daniel holds on-the-floor teaching in such high esteem is that the majority of the knowledge and skills that he has acquired during his job can be attributed to his experiences engaging with various publics and exploring art with them:

...I consider in a lot of ways I sort of learn by doing...I mean, I had taught kids before in a non-school setting over the years. So, I had some experience doing that kind of thing. But, I just kind of got dumped into it. Like I literally sort of slept-walked into that job. I found out along the way, how to go about doing it. (Daniel, transcription, p. 38)

However, Daniel was careful to note that he arrived in the position with certain essential knowledge and skills that he had acquired in previous jobs and education situations. He pointed out that it is vital that new hires have a “background in art history, and art theory, and a background with materials” (Daniel, transcription, p. 38). He believes that this is what museum educators “need to be able to engage well” (Daniel, transcription, p. 26). In

Daniel's opinion, individuals starting a career in museum education should not come into the position as a *tabula rasa* but should have a history of working with art and education; however, they will learn a great deal about communicating with and engaging publics while on the job.

Specialized training for specialized issues

Daniel noted that specialized education is also very important in the professional development of museum educators. This type of education can support the hands-on learning that he values so highly. He noted that his museum has offered some specialized education, which has proven to be very effective. In the museum where Daniel works, there are experts who give talks about special projects, publics, and approaches.

...specialized training. I have had a bit of that. There is a special project that just finished. We had a special training related to Alzheimer's disease and how to go about having a rich museum experience. (Daniel, transcription, p. 38)

Daniel believes that more such education would be beneficial to the museum education staff at his museum:

...more specialized training for specialized issues. Like kids with autism...if there is knowledge out there related to groups with special considerations, it would be good for us to be on the ball as much as possible. (Daniel, transcription, p. 39)

In Daniel's view, museum education is a profession that is constantly evolving.

Incorporating specialized educational programs into the professional development of museum educators can help optimize success.

Stepping back and looking at things

When asked what this life history research process meant for him, Daniel answered emphatically that he had been "happy to participate" (Daniel, transcription, p. 39). He stressed that he found this to be an interesting project and a worthy subject. He

also said that this is a “timely subject” (Daniel, transcription, p. 22). He noted that museums have undergone great changes over the past two decades, and that at times museum professionals may not notice these changes because they are so immersed in their work. As mentioned previously, there have been significant changes recently at the museum where he works, as there is a new head of the department of education. Daniel noted that, with this change, the department of education is going through a process of reflection:

At the [museum], we are going through a reflection period just as a department... There is a new person taking over the department following somebody who has been running it for a very long time who is no longer there... so the new *chef de service* is very open to, really wants to engage in a dialogue with everybody in the department and what it is we do. And, to really have a good long think about what we are doing and how we are doing it, and what the value is and what our strengths and weaknesses are. (Daniel, transcription, p. 22)

Daniel noted that, during some of these departmental dialogues, the fact that a large proportion of the educators have been working in the department for more than ten years came up. He explained that it is “unusual for people to stay at that job for such a long period of time” (Daniel, transcription, p. 22). He believes there must be reasons why these individuals, including Daniel himself, are staying in this field so long, and he sees potential value in exploring these reasons:

...there must be reasons why so many of us have stayed with it for such a long time. And, the question is what are those reasons and that is an interesting thing to look into, because it is clearly happening and so how does that affect the work we do and how does that affect how we perceive the work we do? (Daniel, transcription, p. 22)

Daniel also noted that this observation proves that museum education “is not just the job in between degrees, it is a profession” (Daniel, transcription, p. 22). By reflecting on the reasons for this, museum educators can communicate the value they believe their work

has in the museum and in society: “It is a valuable kind of work and I think that that changes the perception of what we do, within the institution as well” (Daniel, transcription, p. 22).

Daniel feels that the type of research being implemented in this dissertation project could help museum educators take a more reflective approach. He believes that such a process can help educators look at the broader context of what it is that they do:

I think that the most, maybe the most valuable part of it for me, in terms of my practice, is going to be that what you are doing in a sense is you are stepping back and taking a look at things, a look at the world that I have been right in all this time. That taking of context is going to be valuable to me when I get to read your final results. Because it will be a way to look at the broader world that I have been inside for such a long time. (Daniel, transcription, p. 39)

For Daniel, this reflective research process will be more complete when he has a chance to read the final results of this project—to see how his experiences relate to those of other museum educators.

Chapter Five

Character Study: Camille

Opening Biography

Camille was born in Poznań, Poland, in 1976. Her brother was born eleven months after her in the same city. She attended the first grade of elementary school while living in Poland. When she was seven, she and her family stayed in a refugee camp in Austria for eight months before immigrating to Canada. They first moved to Calgary, Alberta, where Camille started second grade. Camille's sister was born while her family was living in Calgary. The family then moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, Hamilton, Ontario, and finally, Burlington, Ontario.

Camille was interested in the arts from an early age: art was her favorite play activity. Her sister was very captivated by drawing as a young girl but did not feel compelled to seriously pursue the arts in elementary or high school. Camille does not recall her brother being involved in the arts at an early age, but he was very intrigued by archaeology and ancient cultures. Interestingly, both Camille's sister and her brother are now involved in art-related employment. Her sister worked in graphic communications at an architecture firm and is currently contemplating returning to school to pursue an education in web design and graphic design. Camille's brother is working on a diploma in architectural technology.

Camille's parents were not particularly interested in the visual arts. However, they were very involved with crafts. Her mother very often knitted, sewed, and worked with needlepoint. Her father did carpentry and continues to create his own fishing lures. While

Camille and her family lived in Poland, it was not possible for many families to purchase stuffed toys, so her father would often sew stuffed animals for his children.

Camille's father was educated as an engineer and works as a technologist. Her mother worked at the same company as him, as a department manager who did project planning. Thus, as a child, Camille did not have any immediate family members who worked in the arts or were educated in arts-related fields. Camille has described her passion for and talent in the visual arts as being "nature rather than nurture" (Camille, email correspondence, 10/19/11). Now that she is making a living in the arts, her parents fully support her in her arts-related endeavors.

After completing elementary school, Camille attended the Etobicoke School of the Arts from 1991 to 1995. She participated in a number of exhibitions, starting in those high school years. From 1997 to 1999, she attended the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) and attained a Foundations Certificate. In 2000, Camille transferred to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), and graduated with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in 2001. She attended the University of British Columbia (UBC) from September 2001 to August 2002, and graduated with a Bachelor's of Education and a K-12 teaching license. While completing this degree, she took a credited summer course at the Vancouver Art Gallery in conjunction with UBC, which revealed to her the possibility of teaching within a museum setting. From 2004 to 2006, Camille attended Concordia University and received a Master's degree in Art Education, with a focus on museum education.

Since 1997, Camille has worked in a wide variety of positions in the arts, including as a photographer for a number of newspapers; an assistant to practicing artists;

a therapeutic arts instructor; a high school art teacher; a gallery educator; a teaching artist in special art programs; an art education teaching assistant; an art education teacher supervisor; a museum education intern; a manager for a program that inserts teaching artists into elementary and high schools; and a director of education in an art gallery, which was her most recent position at the time of our life history interviews. This impressive list indicates that Camille has been and continues to be dedicated to and passionate about a variety of avenues in the world of art and art education since completing her high school education.

Personal Experiences

Early Museum Experiences

My parents were park people

Camille could not recall any art museum experiences from her early childhood. She attributed this to her parents being more interested in nature-related learning activities. She described her parents as being “park people” as opposed to “museum people” (Camille, transcription, p. 1). One particular early non-art-museum experience stood out in her mind—a trip to the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Alberta—when she was around eight years of age. Camille noted that this museum experience was captivating for her parents, since the museum offers a series of nature-related activities outdoors. Although many of the dinosaur artifacts are located within the museum’s walls, large numbers of fossils are located on the museum grounds, outside of the main building. Her most vivid memory of this experience is of her and her family exploring the outdoor section of the museum. It was the discovery-based, hands-on element of the experience

that was most striking to her—a common feature of nature- and science-related museum experiences:

...what I do remember is spending a considerable amount of time searching for fossils with my parents and my brother outdoors, which was actually a really interesting and unique museum experience—that outdoor component and that element of discovery because you are searching for these fossils on your own. And, trying to locate these very small fragments of prehistoric insects in what is a massive area of rock. (Camille, transcription, p. 1)

Camille noted that her brother was very interested in nature- and history-based museum experiences. She described her brother as a “dinosaur fanatic” (Camille, transcription, p. 2). The excitement that her brother exuded when visiting this museum rubbed off on Camille. She stated, “My brother loved it. I don’t know if I was so excited about the dinosaur bones, but I know that because he was so excited about the dinosaur bones, I was excited about that as well” (Camille, transcription, p. 2).

This museum experience fulfilled Camille’s parents’ love of nature-based learning experiences, as well as her brother’s enthusiasm for paleontology. Her family members’ excitement, along with the discovery-based nature of the museum, enhanced Camille’s interest in the activity. The experience left a lasting impression on her, which she touts as being the only museum experience that she can recall from early childhood.

A social type of experience

Although Camille cannot recall any art museum experiences from elementary and high school, she went on a number of art gallery visits during her undergraduate studies at OCAD and NSCAD. She referred to these gallery visits as being a “social type of experience” (Camille, transcription, p. 2), where she would often go with a group of friends. These visits were often at the openings of classmates’ and friends’ art

exhibitions. She recalled, “I was a student and I was mainly going to see student work” (Camille, transcription, p. 2).

After moving to Vancouver to begin her Bachelor of Education degree, Camille began to visit art museums more regularly. She attributed this surge in visits to a group of friends who were frequent museum visitors. She referred to one of them as being particularly influential in her transformation into a frequent museum visitor: “She was a museum-goer and as a result of my friendship with her, I started to go to museums more regularly as a social outing” (Camille, transcription, p. 3). Camille and her social circle had a particular interest in the Vancouver Art Gallery, which she described as hosting exhibits that were intriguing to her and her university friends: “...they had ongoing, rotating, contemporary exhibits that were of international interest. So, a completely different approach to programming, where people in their twenties would be very much interested in going” (Camille, transcription, p. 3). The circle of friends that Camille acquired while studying at UBC, along with the attractive programming at the Vancouver Art Gallery, influenced her to become a more frequent art museum visitor.

The particular friend who sparked Camille’s interest in visiting art museums in Vancouver moved with Camille to Poland in 2002. While living in Poland, they regularly visited museums as a means of becoming better acquainted with their new community:

...I think because we were in Europe, and when you are in a foreign country, one way of experiencing that foreign country as a tourist is to visit all of their cultural institutions. So, I think because I was in Europe, and because I was with this particular friend, I saw a lot of museums in that one year that I lived there...that particular experience was transformational in the sense that once I returned to Canada, I then on my own, continued that—visiting museums on a regular basis. (Camille, transcription, p. 4)

Camille and her friend moved back to Canada the following year. She continued to explore art museums in the cities that she visited after this experience, since, in her opinion, “that is what you do in order to socialize,” especially in a new city (Camille, transcription, p. 4).

Early Out-of-Museum Experiences

Art-making was encouraged

Throughout her early childhood, Camille was encouraged to hone her skills in the visual arts. Her parents supplied her and her siblings with lots of art materials for them to experiment with. Although her father focused more on crafts as a hobby, Camille recalled that she often drew with her father. She also remembers her sister making a significant number of drawings throughout her childhood.

Camille’s artistic talents were often recognized throughout her early childhood and adolescence in Canada. The first time was at the age of seven, when she won a sidewalk drawing contest. Throughout elementary school, her “art-making was encouraged by [her] teachers” (Camille, professional and related personal history, p. 1). When she graduated from elementary school, Camille received the school’s art award and her work was frequently displayed at the Board of Education that her school was associated with. Around the same time, she was commissioned by her parents’ friends to do calligraphy. She then attended the Etobicoke School of the Arts, which is a very well recognized, specialized, arts-focused public high school in Toronto. Camille noted that the students attending this school were encouraged by the staff and faculty to exhibit their work on a regular basis and were given opportunities to do so. Camille exhibited her work in a variety of venues during high school, and continued to do so into her university

career. It is clear that art production has long been an important component of Camille's life.

Recent Museum Experiences

The caliber

Before our life history interview, Camille stacked a series of exhibition catalogues on her living room table. She had visited all of these exhibitions and considered them to have been positive museum experiences: "I think perhaps one signifier of when a museum experience is a positive one for me is I buy the catalogue...So, I think that I would safely say that all of these particular exhibitions were very positive experiences for me" (Camille, transcription, p. 5).

These exhibition catalogues all contain what Camille considers to be high-caliber and often internationally recognized work. She recalled the excitement she experienced in visiting the Louise Bourgeois exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum. Her excitement stemmed from "the stature of that artist and the fact that [she] had wanted to see her for so long" (Camille, transcription, p. 5).

She also recounted her visit to the Guggenheim for the Zaha Hadid exhibition, which showcased the development of Hadid's work as an architect. Camille explained how she was so drawn to the quality of Hadid's work: "I just thought her work was just so absolutely phenomenal. I was just struck by what an incredible architect she is" (Camille, transcription, p. 6). Furthermore, she was not familiar with Zaha Hadid but was pleasantly surprised by her work: "what I think was so great about that particular exhibit and why I put it on top is the fact that it was an incredible, pleasant surprise for me to see her work" (Camille, transcription, p. 6). Hadid's work went beyond her expectations.

Camille also referred to the stature of the Guggenheim Museum and other museums in New York City, and their tendency to display top-quality work with high reputations: “I would probably lump all of the experiences I had in New York as positive experiences—how can they not be? We are talking about museums of incredible reputation, and the caliber of the work displayed there” (Camille, transcription, p. 6).

Shepherded through the experience

When discussing her negative museum memories, Camille recalled a recent experience that she had at the King Tut exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which she went to see with her brother. Her reason for visiting this exhibit was entirely to spend time with her brother:

I didn't hate it, but it is not the kind of experience I would pursue myself...I am not a fan of natural...history museums filled with artifacts and didactic labels. It's not the educational or social experience that I seek out myself. But, because I was with him, I went. (Camille, transcription, p. 8)

Camille said that blockbuster exhibits, which typically draw large crowds, are usually the cause of her negative museum experiences. According to her, the King Tut exhibition fell into this category:

...it is the kind of experience where you are shepherded through the experience. So, it is a timed experience. Essentially, you know, they allow x number of people to go through the gates at a time....in this case, it was your very typical money-making blockbuster. (Camille, transcription, p. 8)

Camille also noted that in timed blockbuster shows, one often feels rushed since visitors are told that there is another group coming right after them. The number of people allowed in at one time in such experiences disrupts Camille's enjoyment of the art and her physical comfort:

...it was so incredibly busy that you could hardly see the work. Because...you couldn't see through the crowd...It turns into an uncomfortable physical

experience in this case, which is very affective. This is what you walk away with, remember[ing] how physically uncomfortable the experience was. (Camille, transcription, p. 9)

For Camille, the experience of being crowded into an exhibition space for a timed blockbuster show is not ideal. She had a strong suspicion that the King Tut exhibit would fit into this category but was willing to overlook the potential disappointment in order to share her brother's interests and spend time with him.

It was a lie

For Camille, another source of frustration when visiting art museums is when the contents of the exhibit do not match her expectations. With the King Tut exhibit, she had expected to see a large number of highly acclaimed artifacts:

...there weren't many pieces in it. And so the lack of content was made up through billboards, etcetera...I expect that when you have a blockbuster show with very exclusive artwork that the title may be misleading. (Camille, transcription, p. 8)

Camille referred to a similar experience she had had, where a show had been advertised as containing a series of Rembrandt's paintings, yet contained only one of his works:

...Rembrandt and the Renaissance. The title of the show suggested that the show would be about one particular artist, where in fact there was only one piece by that artist...I think it was Rembrandt and the Renaissance, when it really should have been Renaissance and One Rembrandt... There was only one! It was a lie in terms of marketing. (Camille, transcription, p. 8)

Camille's brother expressed a similar sense of disappointment with the King Tut show.

He had expected to see the final sarcophagus that was shown on the poster, but it was not in the exhibit and actually has not traveled since the 1970s. Camille's memories of negative museum visits revolve around experiencing a sense of disappointment—when her expectations are not met and when the exhibition display is not conducive for in-depth exploration of artworks.

Professional Experiences

Museum Educator Preparation

I became aware and curious

As mentioned in the opening biography, Camille participated in a teacher preparation course through UBC, which was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The course focused on how teachers can use the museum as a resource. One of her professors, along with the head of public programs at the Vancouver Art Gallery, taught the course. This was the first time that Camille became interested in the work that museum educators do in these informal learning settings:

...that particular teacher institute opened me up to the possibility that one could become an educator in a gallery setting...I was in that environment and all of a sudden I became aware and curious about the jobs and the job preparation involved with the people who were leading those courses. And, I do remember a very particular instance where I wondered how that woman conducting the seminar, how she got there. (Camille, transcription, p. 4)

This experience stayed with Camille, but it was not until after her trip to Poland in 2002 that she consciously decided to pursue museum education. When she returned to Vancouver in 2003, she began to actively explore ways of inserting herself into the world of museum education. She knew at that point that she “wanted to teach in a museum setting” (Camille, transcription, p. 5). She spoke with her landlord, who was a teaching artist, working with a variety of museums and galleries in Vancouver. Starting with this contact person, a series of serendipitous events led Camille into an art museum education position:

I was like “Simon, I need to get into the gallery. How does one do that?” And he was like, “Well, we’ll figure that out. Just leave it to me.” And essentially, the next week he came back with these two contacts, set up an internship for me and put me in contact with... the Vancouver Art Gallery where I started as one of

their volunteers for Family Sundays. But very quickly, within probably a week or two after that, I interviewed for an artist-educator position. (Camille, transcription, p. 10)

This was the beginning of Camille's career as a museum educator. She then worked at the Surrey Art Gallery as an intern, where she met an influential interpretive programmer who encouraged her to pursue a master's degree in museum education. Soon after, Camille followed up on this programmer's advice and commenced a master's degree in art education, with a focus on museum education.

Professional Highlights and Challenges

Breaks the hierarchy

Camille cited her work designing "interpretive spaces" as a major highlight of her current position. A significant amount of space is dedicated to these educational locations in the gallery where Camille works. As she has observed, this dedication to education in the physical space of the gallery helps to break down the hierarchical barriers between curatorial and educational endeavors:

...I think perhaps the one highlight of my current position that I didn't get to experience in any other position, which is new to me, is designing interpretive spaces. Which, I think is very unique to this particular gallery, especially to this extent. I have never seen it done to this extent. At [other galleries] you'd have an interpretive space, but it would be something that was tucked into a corner of a mass, multi-floored exhibit, and was, you know, paper and pencil crayons. Whereas here, it's almost a curatorial process...I don't think this is a philosophical perspective on the part of the gallery; however, it communicates on a philosophical level. So, for example, it breaks the hierarchy because you are devoting 25 out of 100 percent of that space to education, 75 percent towards the actual artists. Which makes a very strong statement about education...despite the fact that [it] is not the director's intent. (Camille, transcription, p. 17)

The interpretive spaces in the gallery where Camille works can be an "entire room or an entire gallery" (Camille, transcription, p. 17) and they are very visible and well used by publics. Thus, when Camille is asked to develop these spaces, she feels that she is

engaging in a curatorial and educational process that will affect visitors' experiences. As a result, the interpretive, educational experience is a strong component in audience members' visits rather than a sideline activity. Camille elucidated her experience: "I do enjoy designing activities that are public and noticeable as opposed to it being a worksheet activity, where it doesn't have a mass audience" (Camille, transcription, p. 17).

The educational department at Camille's gallery also has an opportunity each year to curate an exhibit of student work from the region where the gallery is located. Camille also cited this opportunity as a highlight in her work. This "cross-over between education and curation" (Camille, transcription, p. 18) gives her an opportunity to soften the divide between the two disciplines.

Ongoing learning

Camille said that what drew her to the museum world was "the potential for ongoing learning and ongoing growth" (Camille, transcription, p. 18). For Camille, this opportunity is related to the fact that exhibitions tend to rotate in museums and galleries. She feels that this allows art museum employees to continually engage in new activities and learn new things. And, with this opportunity for life-long learning, there is a greater potential for her career to "span a long time due to its holding interest" (Camille, transcription, p. 18).

Don't take enough risks

In her work, Camille finds that museums often do not "take enough risks in programming" (Camille, transcription, p. 19), which she attributes to "competing priorities" (Camille, transcription, p. 19) within the institution, particularly due to

financial constraints. This restriction is a major challenge for her. The educational programming at her gallery is focused on traditional activities such as “courses, workshops, artist talks, and curator talks” (Camille, transcription, p. 19), since these events do not involve much risk, as the outcomes are predictable and fairly concrete from the outset. She noted that her gallery budgets for these types of activities and does not have financial leeway for more process-oriented education, where the outcome is unknown. She asks, “How do you sell something that loose to a funder or to a board member or to a director, right? When you don’t know what the project will look like. But, that is where creativity happens” (Camille, transcription, p. 19).

Camille also attributed resistance to innovative, process-oriented programming to working with a number of individuals whose museum education philosophies are not aligned with hers:

Another big challenge is working with an older generation of upper management in a very conservative community where...despite wanting change, the individuals at the helm of it are afraid of change. So, working as a thirty-something young professional with a curator who is of the same generation, we [the curator and I] are constantly butting heads with others. (Camille, transcription, p. 19)

Camille noted that the director of her gallery hired her to implement changes in relation to education within their institution. Yet Camille feels that the constraints placed on her prevent her from instigating the positive changes she would like to see. Camille is asked to theorize change for the future but does not imagine ever being able to see it in action:

...the situation is allowing me to only maintain the status quo of their programming. But I am asked to develop it on paper. So, I am planning for it for the future in terms of strategic planning, but I don’t actually get to do it. What I physically do is maintain the status quo. So, I think the discrepancy between the theory and the practice is not fulfilling enough for me... (Camille, transcription, p. 19)

Camille's authority is undermined when senior management does not allow her own philosophy, expertise, and ways of knowing and working to thrive. She exclaimed, "If you've hired me as an expert, then let me run with it" (Camille, transcription, p. 19). She feels that she is not able to fully utilize her unique expertise in her current work situation: "...I can't practice my professional knowledge within this context...at this point you want to be in a place where you could put that, your experience and your education, to practice" (Camille, transcription, p. 14). If she were offered more power and freedom to experiment with and implement innovative programming, Camille would be able to perform her duties as an expert in her field more successfully. Furthermore, the gallery would be better positioned to achieve its goal of instigating positive changes in its programming.

Professional Relationships

Accessible

The type of relationship that Camille aims to create between her visitors and her gallery is one of exchange, which requires high levels of accessibility for the visitors to engage with artworks and the gallery. She tries to develop "opportunities for visitors to reflect on and respond to the artworks, in a way that relates to their lived experiences" (Camille, transcription, p. 20). To enable such engagement, she tries to offer "as many different entry-points as possible" (Camille, transcription, p. 20). The text for exhibits aim to reach out to audience members from a variety of age ranges and backgrounds. Through the inclusion of different entry-points and levels, Camille hopes that "no matter what level or age...what experience you may have or what age you are, that work will be accessible to you hopefully through some avenue" (Camille, transcription, p. 20).

It is their space and their event

Another primary goal for Camille is to give her visitors opportunities to become active generators of content:

What we are striving for in the future is to give our visitors opportunities to directly participate in the generation...of museum content. So, whether that might be curating an exhibit, whether that might be participating in an artist residency that...manifests itself in a project, by directly being able to contribute to the exhibition content through some kind of open-ended outcome of its own. (Camille, transcription, p. 20)

Camille described two examples of how visitors from particular groups were able to engage with exhibitions and the gallery in this way. The first example described a group's response to an exhibit:

So, for example, we participated in tandem with the [exhibition showcasing women artists who deal with alternative, critical explorations of women's experiences related to the realities of being a woman in our society] with a women's studies class from Laurier University, who...toured the show but then set up a blog to further the conversation of ideas about that body of work, and then decided to make postcards, posters, and cards in relation to that exhibit, but also held their own event. (Camille, transcription, p. 20)

The second example outlines how the gallery planned to engaged a group in developing their own exhibit that was to be displayed at the gallery:

Another project that invites the community to participate directly in generating content is a partnership that we have with the museum studies department [at Waterloo University], where we are asking students, as part of their course work, to curate our corridor exhibition, which we then jury. But, to actually allow art students at the undergraduate level to have the opportunity to curate a major exhibit at an art gallery is a tremendous opportunity. (Camille, transcription, p. 21)

With such examples of visitors actively contributing to the creation of programming, Camille noted that a nontraditional relationship between the visitors and the gallery is necessary:

It is their space and their event. And they have the opportunity to use the curator and the educator as a resource. There is a certain element that is a little bit delicate in this situation because we have an interest in producing a quality product, so there is an element of mentorship there as well. But, it does require the people [the curator and the educator] who usually take on particular roles to let go of the ownership. (Camille, transcription, p. 20)

Camille observed that the gallery carefully chooses which publics will generate programming so that these participants are individuals “whose experiences expand on the conversation that particular works might elicit” (Camille, transcription, p. 20). With such educational programming, the curators and educators hand over a portion of their power to the visitors. In this way, programming content becomes a collaborative creation between the gallery and its community.

Great working relationships

When reflecting on her relationship with the people she works with in the education department, Camille immediately exclaimed that she has a “great working relationship with [her] immediate colleagues” (Camille, transcription, p. 21). She specifically referred to the collaborative relationship that she has with the public programs coordinator:

I work very, very directly with the public programs coordinator. So, we mutually decide on everything. Whether it is timing, or programming for family Sundays, or which courses to run or how to design interpretive spaces, that, down to colors and placement, is a very collaborative, mutual decision. (Camille, transcription, p. 21)

Depending on the situation, Camille will enable the public programs coordinator to take ownership of a project if it is her idea and it is important to her, though Camille does have the final say as the head of the education department. These two colleagues are flexible and respectful of each other, and have similar visions of museum education.

According to Camille, this set the groundwork for the ideal working relationship they have developed:

I am hoping that you could work that way with almost anyone, but I think we work extremely well together and therefore we are on the same page so it is easy, and is not a challenge. We agree. (Camille, transcription, p. 21)

Because of this alignment in visions, Camille and the public programs coordinator are able to produce “high-caliber work” (Camille, transcription, p. 23).

Overall, from Camille’s perspective, “there is a lot of conflict in [her] gallery, but it’s just not in [her] department” (Camille, transcription, p. 22). Yet, she does recognize that not all of the relationships that she has with her educational staff are as positive as the one she has with the public programs coordinator.

Deep-seated philosophical difference

An example of a more challenging relationship for Camille is her relationship with the school programs coordinator. There is a significant discrepancy between these two practitioners’ visions for museum education:

...her educational philosophy and my educational philosophy don’t necessarily align. She is a teacher but...I think it is really important that when you are in that role you are not just coming from an educational background, but you actually have a museum education understanding. So, I think some of her lesson planning I would say is below par for my liking and for my standards. (Camille, transcription, p. 22)

She noted that there is a “deep-seated philosophical difference” (Camille, transcription, p. 22) between their philosophies and the way they work. Because of this, Camille feels it would not be worth her while and not even possible for her to dedicate the time required to attempt to change this individual’s vision and practices: “Essentially, I am not sure whether I can change her. I would need somebody with a different skill-set.” (Camille, transcription, p. 22).

Aligned with our philosophies

Although there are very few opportunities for the educators in her department to communicate with the director or the curator, Camille and the public programmer often meet with the curator. For example, when developing interpretive spaces, the three colleagues meet, and Camille and the public programmer present their approach to the spaces to the curator. The curator makes suggestions, which Camille notes “are always useful and [they] always opted to use them” (Camille, transcription, p. 23). It is understood that the curator could veto their plans, though Camille confirmed that this has never occurred.

Camille regularly collaborates with the curator. They “work extremely closely together on overlapping curatorial-educational programming” (Camille, transcription, p. 23). These colleagues develop innovative programming as a team on their own time. The director has not requested that they engage in collaborative endeavors. Rather, the innovative projects that they engage in are their side projects: “So, the things that we are doing that are interesting, we have to do on our own. That is where our work starts to get interesting” (Camille, transcription, p. 21). Camille observed that this relationship has flourished because of their common vision for programming:

I think it is because...we believe in this kind of programming very strongly. We are very aligned with our philosophies in that respect. And we are in a lucky situation where...we do have a very good working relationship...and a commitment to community building and civic engagement and partnership opportunities that explore civic engagement. And we have the leeway to be able to pursue them. (Camille, transcription, p. 23)

Because of their aligned perspectives and goals, Camille and the curator have developed a positive, collaborative working relationship.

Due to her excellent working relationship with her curator, Camille has been able to influence the curator's perspectives related to education—"she is a totally different curator...perhaps that has always been her inner curator" (Camille, transcription, p. 25). For example, the curator has typically felt there is no need for extended labels in her shows. And, the labels that she has displayed contained "very highfalutin" (Camille, transcription, p. 25) language that would be better suited for a more academic audience. Camille has been able to convince her of the importance of "extended labels" (Camille, transcription, p. 25) containing language that is more suitable for the gallery's demographic. Due to their particular dynamic, Camille and her curator have developed a mutually beneficial relationship.

Even though Camille has noted that she and her curator have a progressive type of educator-curator relationship, she still feels that her gallery "operates on a very traditional model" (Camille, transcription, p. 25) in relation to curatorial decision-making. She does not have any input into the curatorial process and education-related decisions "come in at the tail end of that to animate the show" (Camille, transcription, p. 25). In other words, despite the particularly progressive curator-educator dynamic that Camille and her curator have developed, the gallery still views education as simply being "a tack-on" (Camille, transcription, p. 25).

Sticking their fingers into the pot

Although the director of Camille's gallery rarely communicates with her, there has been a recent increase in his involvement with educational program decision-making. This is due to the implementation of a managerial process that occurs on a weekly basis:

...so, myself, the curator, the director general, the director of finance, and administration, and the director of development and marketing discuss issues

pertinent to the organization, and make consensus-based decisions on items that are going to affect the future direction of the gallery. (Camille, transcription, p. 24)

Consequently, each member of the management team has an opportunity to have a say in significant decisions: “every decision is impacted by the opinions of these other management members” (Camille, transcription, p. 24).

At first glance, this process appears to be democratic and even collaborative. However, Camille noted that the distribution of power in this process is unequal: “...there isn’t equality between generations. So, for example, whatever the director says goes, despite opposition. But, we don’t necessarily have that clout” (Camille, transcription, p. 24). Furthermore, Camille expressed frustration with managers outside of her department having a strong voice in decisions relating to education:

That said, I do have issues with people like the director of development and marketing making decisions about programming when that is not their area of expertise. I think what they should be concerning themselves with is supporting me with programming in terms of generation of funds or marketing, but not having input into the direction of programming. I think that is kind of taking this parliamentary approach to decision-making a little bit too far. (Camille, transcription, p. 24)

The director of development and marketing does not have any expertise in education, yet she seems to have a significant say in how Camille’s programming should be conducted. This creates a difficult situation for Camille. She exclaimed, “You don’t want people who don’t know what they are talking about sticking their fingers into the pot” (Camille, transcription, p. 24). Camille believes that this system misses its democratic intentions and undermines her expertise.

Museum Educator Roles and Education

Disparity between theory and practice

Camille believes that there is an obvious shift in museums, whereby education is playing a more prominent role in museum policies. She noted that this is because funders are becoming increasingly interested in educational initiatives in museums:

For example, a lot of grants won't support activities that are not educational activities. You have an increase of funding towards educational projects. So that...sets the direction. And, that direction obviously is reflective of what is important on a more national level. What the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Arts Council is valuing is education. And, what you see in the museum setting is the trickle-down effect of that. So more sponsorship of educational initiatives leads to more programming and more educational staff...because it [education] is enveloped in their organizational mandates, it signals that it is important and that it is valued. (Camille, transcription, p. 26)

Yet Camille feels that this appreciation of education is not being carried out in practice:

I think there is still disparity between theory and practice. So, even though, yes, education is referenced in the mission of the museums, what is the value of education on the totem pole and what is happening in reality? In reality, it is still functioning on a bread-and-butter modernist model...where you are providing basic services...where education supports curatorial. (Camille, transcription, pp. 26-27)

Camille would like to see more of a connection between curatorial and educational endeavors, where education could be “enveloped into the curatorial process” (Camille, transcription, p. 27). She envisions this as being a future reality, as curators are becoming more involved with collaborative activities:

I think things are starting to change a little bit in terms of partnerships. I think it is a generational shift. Curators now are people of our generation, who have also benefited from the same kind of training and who are interested in programming surrounding their content. The university art galleries...are curating exhibits that are educational in content. I believe that this is something that will continue. (Camille, transcription, p. 27)

Camille's work developing interpretive spaces and collaborating with the gallery curator is a testament to this shift and demonstrates the potential future alignment of theory and practice, where education would play a more prominent, integrated role in museum workings.

Specific training

Camille believes that education for museum educators needs to cater to the particular museum education position they engage with. For example, "there are different training needs based on whether you are approaching an adult audience or a child audience" (Camille, transcription, p. 27). She feels that specialized museum training is critically important for museum educators. She believes a background in teaching in formal education settings is always good but insufficient. In reference to her school programs coordinator, she stated, "I would really like it if this person wasn't just a schoolteacher, but if she had specific training in museum education" (Camille, transcription, p. 27). For Camille, museums are a specific learning context, requiring a very specific education. According to her, without such a specific education in the field, museum educators will inevitably have more difficulty connecting with visitors and developing high-caliber, meaningful learning situations.

Practicum component

Camille believes that practicum components in pre-service education programs for museum educators are highly valuable opportunities to link theory and practice:

...I think that as a pre-service teacher, I really think a practicum component in a museum setting...that would orientate that person to the reality of working in an arts organization would be beneficial. So, for example, I think, perhaps the one thing that I might criticize about my schooling is that...everything is theory, and not enough is practice. (Camille, transcription, p. 27)

Her ideal preparation program would discuss and incorporate some of the real-life restrictions that museum educators often come upon:

...a useful exercise at some point might be to assign a project with real-life restrictions on [a] particular project. Or within a practicum component, if you are creating a project for an organization and you are working with members of that organization, they would be able to...orient a student to the feasibility and the real-life challenges of working [on that project]. (Camille, transcription, p. 27)

Camille also believes that “ongoing professional development is essential”

(Camille, transcription, p. 28). She feels it is important to be encouraged to attend conferences in the field to communicate with other professionals and see the kind of work they are doing. Such conferences provide a forum for sharing practical and theoretical work. By addressing real-life challenges in pre-service education and in-service professional development in these ways, Camille feels that museum educators would be better prepared for the realities associated with their work.

Self-awareness

Camille describes herself as a “naturally self-reflective person” (Camille, transcription, p. 28). For her, participating in this project has helped her to draw on this natural inclination: “It certainly makes me more aware of...my personal choices. Perhaps...having that self-awareness at the forefront may consciously shape my future decisions” (Camille, transcription, p. 28). Thus this process has helped Camille to reflect on why she engages in particular practices, how she may practice in the future, and what she may choose to explore in her future career choices. She feels that individuals who are not as self-reflective may particularly benefit from professional development endeavors that involve life history research: “I think that perhaps if one were not as inclined towards self-reflection, you could really benefit from this” (Camille, transcription, p. 28).

According to Camille, life history research processes give individuals who are not inclined to engage in self-reflection an opportunity to examine the origins of their beliefs and practices—the path that led them to where they are today.

Learning more about that path

The potential intersections between the stories of the participants in this project are of great interest to Camille: “I am very curious to read the results and see if there are any kinds of shared paths or decisions or choices or intersections between the life histories of the people you are studying” (Camille, transcription, p. 28). She feels that exploring these connections may assist museum educator instructors in creating development programs:

...one thing I think might have an impact, is that, if you do pull out common themes, perhaps those common themes, whatever it is you find out from this life history research could...impact on designing professional training in museum education. I can see life history impacting training for these people [museum educators]. So, you have this continuum of professional experience that led these people to a certain place...all these people decided to pursue certain paths independently, which got them to where they are. But by learning more about that path perhaps and having that knowledge will help us, help or support other people that are in the process of transition to get somewhere more quickly or to understand what their needs might be along that journey. So, I think, maybe there is potential for [the] training of museum educators...(Camille, transcription, p. 28)

Camille believes that, by researching the lived experiences of museum educators, the people engaged in developing university and development programs for these professionals will be better prepared to guide museum educators in their careers.

Chapter Six

Character Study: Emma

Opening Biography

Emma was born in Brazil in 1961. She grew up with her mother, father, and younger brother. They lived in the city of Curitiba, the capital of the province of Paraná. Her father was a typographer, her mother was a housewife, and her brother eventually became an art director working in advertising. During her school years, the Brazilian Military Government ruled the country. Schools were particularly strict during those years. Emma offered an example to illustrate the authoritarian nature of her school at that time:

...I remember we had to sing the national anthem twice a week, the whole school. The school was immense...Everybody was lined up like soldiers. Then there was this supervisor that would check if you had everything—your white shirt, your belt, your shoes, your...school...patch, attached hair, you know...Then put the flag up and sing. It was pretty serious business...We didn't know what was going on. I found out much later. (Emma, transcription, p. 7)

At that time, Emma was interested in art; however, she was just as enthusiastic about geography and physical education.

As her father had passed away when she was very young, she started working early to help with the household finances. At the age of fifteen, Emma acquired a job at an advertising firm. She noted that it was difficult to attend school during those years, as she was working during the day and participating in night school to complete high school: “I remember that was a year that was extremely hard” (Emma, transcription, p. 3). She stayed at the advertising agency until 1980. In 1981, she became the project

coordinator at the Provincial Ministry of Culture in Curitiba, which was responsible for the arts at a provincial level, including theatre, opera, ballet, and museums.

Emma first visited Canada in 1988 and immigrated in 1991. During the 1990s, she was a colorist for animation films, working on contract. At the same time, she worked with preschool students, developing art education workshops. One of the projects that she worked on at that time was an identity art project that observed racism and prejudice among young children. While working on this project, Emma decided that she wanted to start an undergraduate degree in art education. In 1997, she became the coordinator of an international development project in Brazil. She worked with and accompanied five Canadian youths during a two-month stay in Brazil. During their time in Brazil, she helped these young adults explore art as a tool for transformation.

Thus, Emma became very involved in community art education over the years, leading her to enter a master's degree program in art education at Concordia University, which she started in 1997 and completed in 2003. While working on this degree, Emma was employed as a visual arts teacher at a community-based outreach anti-violence organization. She also became the visual arts facilitator for an afterschool program for "at-risk" high school students. Emma used art as a tool for motivation and for developing meaning with these high school students, who were at risk of dropping out. This work ultimately culminated in her master's thesis, which focused primarily on "empowerment through art expression" (Emma, transcription, p. 17).

In 2003, Emma obtained her current position at an artist-run center, where she is the educational program coordinator. In the beginning, Emma worked on outreach project planning and the animation of exhibition visits for "an uninitiated public" (Emma,

transcription, p. 18). Later on, she engaged in an ongoing, long-term collaboration with a community group, which lasted three years. Now she is also involved in organizing artist-talks, special workshops, and documentation.

In her art practice, Emma works with video and drawing. Over the years, she has exhibited her work in a variety of venues. The most recent work that she exhibited was a collaborative video project that was on display in 2010.

Personal Experiences

Early Museum Experiences

A very powerful experience

Museum visits were not common during Emma's childhood. She did not visit museums with her family: "It wasn't a tradition in my family to go to museums at all" (Emma, transcription, p. 3). Emma does recall one visit that she participated in with her school, when she was twelve or thirteen years of age. This experience was at a historical museum in Paraná, called Museu Paranaense. Emma referred to this as being "a very powerful experience" (Emma, transcription, p. 3). She spoke of the excitement that she felt in visiting the museum, due to her affinity for historical museums: "My excitement... I love artifacts, I love historical museums" (Emma, transcription, p. 3). The architectural treatment of this particular space was what left a lasting impression on her:

What was powerful was the building, the architecture of the building, art nouveau. Very beautiful. So, I was very impressed by the building, I remember. And, the lighting. Entering this space and the lighting was so dim, so dark... The smell of the place. (Emma, transcription, p. 3)

The experience with the Museu Paranaense has remained with her over the years and she is reminded of it from time to time. She was transported back to this experience years

later while visiting the Redpath Museum at McGill University: "...I think I had more or less the same experience going to the McGill Redpath Museum, many years later, with similar furniture and lighting" (Emma, transcription, p. 3). The building associated with this early memory left a strong impression on Emma.

The museum disappeared

When asked about an early positive museum experience, Emma immediately shared an encounter she had with a painting more than fifteen years ago. She is still very affected by the memory:

It is still very vivid as an experience for me. It was...the first time, and I must say that I never had such a strong response to an artwork...I had such a strong response to it that I still have that emotion. (Emma, transcription, p. 1)

The experience with this artwork was very emotive and physical: "I remember really the tears dropping on the ground...what an encounter" (Emma, transcription, p. 5). She felt as though the surrounding space simply dissolved, leaving her and the painting:

[The experience] hit me so strongly that I had tears in my eyes...I really remember the beauty of it, the power of its colors. It was a very physical reaction. And so, the museum disappeared. I only have this very vivid memory of being in front of that painting and experiencing that. It was almost as if the museum disappeared. What I retain is the experience of the painting, not the space in which it was placed. (Emma, transcription, p. 1)

The space seemed to disappear to such an extent that Emma does not recall which museum she was visiting: "I remember the painting clearly and my experience, but I don't remember if it was part of an exhibition of the Museum of Fine Arts of Montreal or if it was MoMA. I have no idea!" (Emma, transcription, p. 1). Furthermore, she could not recall whether or not she was visiting the museum with other people. She noted that where the experience occurred and who she was with "really didn't matter" (Emma,

transcription, p. 2). What did matter to Emma was the painting itself, *The Sower*, by Vincent Van Gogh.

Relationship with the working class

Emma reflected on what it was about this painting that triggered such a visceral and emotional reaction in her. The subject matter immediately sprang to her mind: "...it is this sower, the earth, the earth, the adding to this earth...there is something" (Emma, transcription, p. 5). For Emma, the fact that this now renowned painter was depicting working-class people in this way was extremely moving:

You know, the life of peasants...Maybe now that I am recalling this experience, why did it touch me so much? I don't think that it is related to the colors. I find that is more subconscious...my relationship with the working class...[I am] very touched by this value of those individuals in our world, in our lives...those individuals being represented in a *painting*. (Emma, transcription, p. 5)

Van Gogh's depiction of a worker toiling with the land is what resonated with Emma—what made it important to her.

Early Out-of-Museum Art Experiences

A special room for art

It was during high school that the arts began to take on a more significant role in her life: "Then, in high school, it was very present in our curriculum. Visual arts and music, theatre as well" (Emma, transcription, p. 5). What she particularly enjoyed about the arts in her high school was the fact that there were spaces dedicated to these subject matters:

What I liked very much was that we had a special room for art, and we would go in the basement—a basement with windows. And, I remember liking to go there...downstairs was visual arts and...music. Two different rooms with instruments and all that. (Emma, transcription, p. 6)

Emma enjoyed the unstructured projects, filled with free-choice learning, that were offered in these spaces:

I liked the space—the freedom. We had projects but it was not that structured. So, I remember enjoying it, to choose the instrument that I wanted to play...it is more the approach that I liked than anything else. (Emma, transcription, p. 6)

Emma associated the art spaces in her high school with freedom and possibilities for experimentation.

Recent Museum Experiences

Born from this synergy

When asked about recent positive museum experiences, Emma shared her visit to the DIA Foundation in New York State. She found the space particularly impressive:

It used to be Nabisco, I guess. The factory was turned into this foundation, which is a huge, amazing space...beautiful space...A lot of space. Very high ceilings. And it is natural lighting...it is quite impressive. (Emma, transcription, pp. 7-8)

Emma was affected by the curators' ability to use the space in a way that skillfully showcased the artworks on display. The exhibit that she reflected on was by Tacita Dean.

Emma found that the space worked in perfect cohesion with Dean's work:

...the work demanded a lot of silence because it was...six or eight different screens with a projection of *The Stillness of Merce Cunningham*...making a dialogue with John Cage's silence pieces...what impressed me was the ability of an exhibition, [an] institution...to adapt a space according to the content of the exhibition...a synergy between the space and the artist's artwork...it was so tight and strong that the work was almost born from this synergy. I said, that is what an institution has the ability to offer, not only white walls but to really work on how they can enhance a dialogue with a proposal of an artist with the environment that they have. (Emma, transcription, p. 8)

The piece needed silence, and the chosen space provided that:

And the sound, because really the only sound you have in this installation was the sound of the six or eight projectors, so you could hear clicking, clicking. And you are also completely protected from the outside world. You are completely

immersed, which is very much what it is all about. So, wow! The institution respected that. (Emma, transcription, p. 9)

Emma was enthralled with the immersive experience that this museum offered her. She was so connected with the artwork on display that the museum seemed to dissolve around her: "...I was immersed in the work and I forgot everything else. I wish all museums could do that. Let's forget that we are in a white-walled cube. Can we have the ability to provide other kinds of experience?" (Emma, transcription, p. 9). Emma is impressed when she experiences a symbiotic relationship with the artwork on display. This offers her an opportunity to really engage with the work and even become lost in it.

There was no care

The elements associated with Emma's experience at the DIA Foundation were missing from a recent negative experience that Emma had at an art festival in Quebec City. The treatment of the spaces did not support the artworks. Rather, there was so much work that the pieces interrupted each other:

I couldn't go through the whole exhibition that was taking place in those two buildings...because there were too many artworks that were put together in such a sloppy way that one work was contaminating the others completely. You know, the works that need space to breath or need silence. The videos were one next to [the] other. One work was contaminating the other. It was terrible. It was impossible to engage with the artworks. There was no care. (Emma, transcription, p. 12)

Emma felt that she was unable to effectively engage with the artworks due to the setup of the space, leading her to leave the exhibition without seeing all of the work.

Emma related this need for effective displays to her work as a museum educator:

...I think that is one of the elements that seems to be fundamental in museum education. Because, to me, the programming is central to everything else that happens in the gallery, museum, or artist-run center. Everything emerges from it. So, for me, if that doesn't work, it is going to be very hard to have anything else

around, you know, exhibition visits, conferences...So, for me it is fundamental. (Emma, transcription, p. 12)

Exhibitions that do not showcase the artworks in an eloquent way do not generate positive museum visits for Emma. Interestingly, she feels that such issues would also negatively affect her in her work as a museum educator.

Professional Experiences

Museum Educator Preparation

Very rhizomatic

The fact that art has been a common theme in her life “didn’t come from school, didn’t come from family” (Emma, transcription, p. 3). Emma stumbled into the world of art by obtaining a position at an advertising firm in 1976. As mentioned in the opening biography, she began to work to help out her family, as her father had passed away three years before. But the catalyst that led her to search for a job was a desire to own a pair of jeans:

...jeans were just appearing. And I *really* wanted a pair of jeans. I was fifteen, I think...And I [informed] my mom that I really would like to have a pair of jeans. She told me, you know, that unfortunately we didn’t have the means to buy a pair of jeans. She could sew, and she said “I could sew one for you.” I said “I don’t want the one that was sewed. I want a ‘real’ one.” And she said...“I cannot give you that. You will need to find a job to get it.” I looked in the newspaper the same day and I had an interview the next day...And I got my jeans! (Emma, transcription, p. 4)

As Emma noted, “that was the beginning of [her] professional life” (Emma, transcription, p. 4). She is grateful to have opened that newspaper on that particular day, with the intention of finding a job, as this chance occurrence opened so many doors in her life, leading her to where she is now:

So many openings in my life. Perhaps, you know, I would find, I don't know, a different road and I would go because I wanted a pair of jeans!...I find...the paths of my life are quite interesting. There is an unfolding. Very rhizomatic. (Emma, transcription, p. 4)

She stayed at this firm for a number of years, eventually becoming the company secretary. Following this, at the age of eighteen, she started to work for the Ministry of Culture in the province of Paraná as the *Secretaria de Cultura* (cultural secretary). She worked there for eight years, developing projects mainly in the fields of music and visual arts.

After moving to Canada in 1991, Emma continued to be engaged in the arts. She completed a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in art education. After completing her master's degree in 2003, Emma serendipitously started working at an artist-run center:

The coordinator [of the artist-run center] at that time was a friend who was looking for someone to work on an outreach project to demystify current [art] among different communities...Knowing about projects that I had been developing in community sites...they invited me to work with them on that specific project. (Emma, transcription, p. 18)

Emma continues to work at this artist-run center two days a week. Her other work activities include teaching university courses and developing workshops for art teachers and their students.

Emma noted that most of her work activities have been the result of communication with like-minded individuals, which naturally led to collaborations. She stated, "I realize that I *always* worked in collaboration" (Emma, transcription, p. 15). She feels that "...the only way that we can make a change is by working with the other— negotiating, making changes" (Emma, transcription, pp. 15-16). She believes she has been very fortunate to meet and work with individuals who share these sentiments:

...I feel that I navigate in a community of artists and cultural...professionals. So, quite often we talk about what we do, mutual interests, questions, etcetera. Quite often my collaborations began from these encounters, word of mouth. (Emma, transcription, p. 18)

Through fortuitous events and encounters, Emma has found engaging work in the visual arts and has developed very positive collaborative relationships.

Professional Highlights and Challenges

Very meaningful

When asked about the highlights associated with her work, Emma immediately referred to a partnership that she developed with an adult literacy group, which lasted just over three years. This project was important to her because it gave artists, non-artists, and an art educator an opportunity to collaborate and learn from each other through art: “It was really a highlight because that provided me with an opportunity to really engage artists, non-artists...and myself as an art educator, all together to develop a project” (Emma, transcription, p. 18). During this project, Emma saw “the potential for collaboration...between different organizational structures” (Emma, transcription, pp. 18-19). She finds that art educators tend to work in isolation, and this project enabled her to break out of her seclusion.

The collaborators learned from each other, developing a visual and oral language that supported their collaboration:

...the highlight to be able to work and learn from a group of illiterate adults where the visual and the oral became our common language. That is very possible with contemporary art—sound is there, interventions, performance. We are no longer obliged to know how to paint or to draw to make art. So that allowed us to work on a project that was very meaningful for the...participants and for us as well. (Emma, transcription, p. 19)

What made this project particularly meaningful for her artist-run center was that it enabled her and her colleagues to reflect on the place of community projects in their center, and how to best initiate and sustain them:

There was a point at which we also had to really reflect about our values, about why we are working with a community organization, in our governance...And that was a very interesting process. How do we communicate the project? How do we name the project? Is the project part of programming or is it a special project, an outsider? So, it was very rich. (Emma, transcription, p. 19)

This in-depth project supported meaningful learning for both partners, which Emma believes is the basis of positive collaboration.

The love story started

This particular collaboration started with the community organization contacting the artist-run center after receiving a brochure that advertised the center's free educational program. Emma went to the community center to find out what it was that the organization wanted and expected from the visit:

I went to their center before they came here. They told me that they had negative experiences in museums previously. And it wasn't a long time before. So, the organization facilitator was really upfront. She told me the experiences were really, really negative because of not being able to reach out or acknowledge where the group was coming from, using very difficult language. Jargon and all that. She made me aware of the realities faced by the group. So, I was able to be well-prepared. So that is how the love story started. (Emma, transcription, p. 20)

Emma found meaningful entry-points for these visitors to engage with artworks during their first visit to the gallery. Finding such pertinent links for groups is another highlight of her job:

One of the pleasures for me on a daily basis is to develop scenarios for exhibition visits...Entry-points or conversations, or dialogues. Connecting the artist's work with the visitor's life experiences and knowledge. How can I make the artist's work "readable" to them without evacuating the artist's intention? I love that...When I had the first visit with the group from [name of a community group focusing on adult literacy], that was very interesting. The artist was there...I

remember starting the visit by introducing a reproduction of *Le Printemps* by Botticelli and asking them if this work was, according to them, easier to understand than the work of the contemporary artist... This question triggered a very significant exchange about art, and art interpretation that was accessible to a group unfamiliar with contemporary art as well. (Emma, transcription, p. 19)

Emma noted that the development of the relationship was not simple, which is typical of collaborative endeavors: “Adjustments, fostering trust, capacity to listen to each other, etcetera” (Emma, transcription, p. 20). They found an intriguing link between their experiences to initiate their collaboration:

It was very hard. The project was very demanding. The encounter of two institutions and their specific cultures, you know. Somehow two “marginalized” ones. This was our point of encounter. To know we are an artist-run center... Artists and artist-run centers are struggling to survive. We realized that, yeah, we are all somehow “marginalized” in society. That was very interesting. (Emma, transcription, p. 20)

By visiting the community center prior to the group’s first visit to the artist-run center, catering to the group’s particular needs and interests, and finding a common link between the two organizations, Emma was able to lay the groundwork for a positive long-term relationship between her artist-run center and these adults.

Constant invisible work

Emma noted that a common challenge that she encounters in her position is trying to develop and maintain such positive relationships with other groups through outreach programming:

[A] challenge is the outreach. Consolidating and maintaining the relationship with community groups... constant invisible work, which tends to be forgotten or undervalued... Getting and maintaining. (Emma, transcription, p. 20)

Emma acknowledged that it would be enriching to have more long-term relationships with community groups such as the one that which was developed between the artist-run center and the adult literacy group. At the same time, she believes that this type of

relationship is only natural and positive if the group clearly desires to be involved with her center in this way: “I feel that they should *want* to” (Emma, transcription, p. 20).

Exploratory practices of emerging artists

The artist-run center where Emma is employed specifically supports the work of emerging artists working with experimental practices: “Contrary to museums in general, we present new work of emerging artists, [whose] projects are usually of [an] exploratory nature” (Emma, transcription, p. 19). She finds this to be a stimulating highlight, but it is also one of her main challenges, as it “demands a lot of creativity in order to develop sound and responsible educational resources” (Emma, transcription, p. 20). Because the artists are emerging, there is little literature outlining their current and previous artistic products, processes, and intentions. Emma often does not know the contents of a show until the opening of the exhibit:

...one of the challenges is the lack or the very few resources related to the work of the exhibiting artists... So, in order to prepare educational resources, I only have the artist’s project proposal, his or her biography, and a paragraph of his or her artistic statement. Usually, I get fully acquainted with the exhibition at the end of its *montage*, which tends to be the day of its opening. That is one of the main challenges. A happy one though. (Emma, transcription, p. 20)

This is a “happy” challenge for Emma, because she feels that working with such current art is very exciting, and offers her a wide variety of points of entry for her to help connect this type of art to her publics: “the potential to create an opportunity to connect with the public is huge. With current art there are many, many ways of doing it” (Emma, transcription, p. 13).

Professional Relationships

Offering a glass of water

Emma tries to create “a convivial and meaningful exchange with [her] visitors” (Emma, transcription, p. 20). She acknowledges that entering contemporary art spaces can be difficult for some people, particularly those who have never visited such spaces before. This might be particularly true when entering an artist-run center’s space:

I know that the gallery, with its quite “sacred” tone, is very intimidating to a lot of people, especially a non-initiated visitor...It needs to be joyful and not an intimidating first contact. You enter that door, you are right in front of an artist’s project. There are no tickets to buy, there is no security, and there is no boutique. One or two steps, you are right in front of the work. The non-initiated visitors usually don’t know where to start from. “I don’t get it, what is this?” It can be very threatening somehow, [so much so] that sometimes I see them at the door and they don’t enter. (Emma, transcription, p. 21).

Emma makes every effort to engage with her publics in friendly, welcoming ways:

...so for me, it is one of my mantras [to be particularly convivial], you know, with the first contact, with all visitors, no matter where they come from. Because when I am here...I try to engage with visitors...and that can be simply by offering a glass of water! (Emma, transcription, p. 21)

Her idea to provide visitors with a welcoming glass of water was instigated by a visit with a class of adolescent students:

...that was triggered by a group of thirty young teenagers that we received from a school. They were all thirsty, and I have water here, and I thought that would be a way for us to solve the thirsty problem [and] to start a conversation. I might assume, it was not a disinterested strategy. “Would you like to have some water?” You know? To me, it is very much in this convivial nature. From there, we can enter the space of visual arts. (Emma, transcription, p. 21)

Emma tries to develop an amicable relationship with her visitors. She does this through friendly gestures that can make visitors feel more at ease. She feels that when such a relationship and level of comfort are established, visitors will be able to engage with the space and the artworks in more in-depth, meaningful ways.

There is no hierarchy

Only a small number of people work at Emma's artist-run center:

...it is a small structure. We are a small team...The artistic coordinator, and the webmaster IT specialist, who are full-time. And the administrative assistant (one day a week) and myself as [the] art educator (two days a week). (Emma, transcription, pp. 10, 13)

Because of this small number of workers and because of the governing structure of artist-run centers, the relationships between Emma and her colleagues are very different from what is usually possible in traditional museum settings. Emma describes traditional museum structures as being “so complex, so compartmental, hierarchical” (Emma, transcription, p. 10). This starkly contrasts with Emma's reality, as she works in very close collaboration with all of her colleagues: “Different structure. So different. It is less bureaucratic. It is more participatory. And so there is always this back and forth negotiation. So, it is quite a process” (Emma, transcription, p. 13). Even the physical space—small and all on one floor—contributes to this participatory nature: “It is a physical space that we are right there, we are circulating, so it is natural to be part of the process...” (Emma, transcription, p. 10). Emma noted that because there is this emphasis on participation and collaboration each of the members of the team needs to be flexible and able to multitask:

...you need to be able to become an “octopus” in a multitasking structure. To work in an artist-run center, you need to have a number of expertise...Everybody does quite a lot...so many things that you contribute...Which I find great. At the same time, it is very demanding. (Emma, transcription, p. 13)

For example, even though Emma is the center's educator, “all the proposals and ideas related to the sector [education] are always discussed and/or shared with the [name of the

artist-run center] team” (Emma, transcription, p. 21). Likewise, Emma helps with the other sectors of the center:

All the literature and communication produced and not only the ones related to the [learning] sector are usually read by the three of us. Sometimes I create literature and then [the IT specialist] and I look at it...we are always exchanging. (Emma, transcription, p. 23)

Furthermore, mundane tasks are shared amongst the four members:

But do you know what? We also end up washing the floors...the center structure is very horizontal. There is no hierarchy. It is quite something. You know, we also wash the floors, wash the dishes. I do it. We hate doing it. But we do it. (Emma, transcription, p. 23)

Although Emma is often extremely busy on the days that she works at the center, so much so that she believes she does “four days in two” (Emma, transcription, p. 23), she feels very supported by her colleagues. Again, this is thanks to the nonhierarchical structure of this organization:

What I find really rewarding is that I am very much supported by my teammates. I am not alone. Even though I am the only art educator, I don’t work alone—never. I have a lot of *carte blanche*. I do my own guidelines, I receive bookings for visits, I contact groups, I do the whole communication related to the learn sector, development and implementation. But I am very supported...It’s really, really great. (Emma, transcription, p. 23)

Emma is very appreciative of the lack of hierarchy in her place of work. This naturally leads to a more participatory and collaborative environment, in which she thrives.

I come in after

Although there is an emphasis on collaboration between colleagues at the artist-run center where Emma works, curatorial decisions are made by the five members of a programming committee. At the time of our interviews, Emma was not working on this committee, due to her other commitments, as it “is demanding being part of the programming committee” (Emma, transcription, p. 22). The committee plans for a full

year, and then Emma plans her learning activities around the committee's programming choices: "I come in after" (Emma, transcription, p. 22).

Emma is "comfortable with the way it is working" (Emma, transcription, p. 22), as she is more concerned with having rich exhibitions than necessarily choosing exhibitions based on their educational potential. She believes that once strong programming has been established, "Education will happen" (Emma, transcription, p. 22). After the programming has been decided, Emma works in close collaboration with her colleagues to develop educational programming.

We have to adapt to each exhibition

At the artist-run center where Emma works, the artists propose the setup for their exhibitions, but the coordinator and technician offer suggestions:

The artists propose the *mise en place* [setup] of their work. But quite often [the coordinator and technician] contribute a great deal with the mounting process, conceptually and pragmatically. Quite often we give some suggestions. Not only about the formal aspects, but formal aspects that we have observed [make] an impact on how the visitor usually occupies or circulates the space. (Emma, transcription, p. 24)

Still, there have been times when artists chose to stick with an exhibition setup that would be difficult for viewers to navigate through:

An example, recently, the artist closed the entrance completely with a black curtain. And we found that that choice didn't work formally for the project. And, also, the device did not invite the visitors to enter the space. We proposed other options, but she really wanted that...And, of course, the artist has the last say. We observed later on how many people were intimidated and wouldn't enter the gallery. (Emma, transcription, p. 24)

Emma shared another example, which actually posed a safety issue for visitors:

We had an artist who had a painting on the floor right at the gallery entrance. Interesting idea. However, we mentioned to him that visitors could step on it, either destroying the painting or sliding with it, since the painting had a splash of oil paint on it. Indeed, I kept replacing the painting on the ground and the artist

fixing the splash of oil paint...they [visitors] got distracted with the title of the exhibition or with me sitting here, and they just walked through the painting...And there was a danger of someone hurting himself or herself. Question of liability. (Emma, transcription, p. 25)

Emma noted that it can be difficult to develop programming for such exhibitions, but she definitely accepts this challenge: "...we have to adapt to each exhibition...I have to embrace that challenge" (Emma, transcription, p. 25).

Museum Educator Roles and Education

Participators in a process of action

Emma believes that the museum educator's primary role is to support visitors' active interpretation:

My conception of the contemporary role of museum education...How can we provide a territory for active interpretation from the part of the visitors? We are showing artifacts, artwork. Always in the context of active enjoyment and understanding art, and to act in real engagement with the art. (Emma, transcription, p. 26)

Emma feels that educators need to focus on dialogue and encouraging an active, respectful, and collaborative relationship between educators and visitors in order to achieve this:

The key is really dialogue and understanding that the visitor who is arriving is carrying knowledge. We are here together. My role, the conception for me is we are participators in a process of action. I aim to present questions to guide towards better understanding rather than right answers. (Emma, transcription, p. 26)

It is her belief that museum educators are there to help visitors become more comfortable and adept at engaging with art, thus promoting autonomy:

I think what is important for us is that our role as museum educators is not to make or force the visitor to like the artwork, but rather to help them learn how to engage with an artwork and how to develop conversation about the work. Our role, in my view, is to provide the visitors with the necessary tools and strategies to become an autonomous viewer. To learn to look for and give meaning to the artwork. (Emma, transcription, p. 26)

According to Emma, museum educators are there to assist visitors in becoming active participants not only during a single museum visit, but with their subsequent experiences with art. She believes that respectful, collaborative, dialogue-based relationships between educators and their visitors and the use of art interpretation strategies are the keys to achieving this.

How to engage the other

Emma feels that museum educators need to be familiar with a variety of fields to be successful in their work:

...art history, communication skills, pedagogical competencies, strategies and methodologies in art interpretation, knowledge and understanding of a formalist approach, a phenomenological approach, semiotic, you name it. Having an overview, a background—theoretical. (Emma, transcription, p. 26)

Having a strong background in art interpretation methods is key for the education of museum educators, according to Emma: “Understand that museum education is not a mere transfer of information” (Emma, transcription, p. 26). However, she emphasized that having a theoretical background is not enough—educators need to be able to implement these approaches in practice:

And then, of course, being able to embrace practice. How a specific exhibition calls for more of a formalistic approach, as opposed to a multicultural approach. So, that overview of art interpretation, and after that, being able to oversee the potential of the content of the exhibition and creating those links and the guidelines. You need that theoretical and practical background—the transfer to the practical. You need to be knowledgeable about art and also on how to engage the other with it. (Emma, transcription, p. 27)

Emma teaches a university-level course that focuses on art interpretation strategies. Her students truly appreciate the chance to put these theories into practice during the course:

I teach a course on methodologies and approaches on how to engage children and teenagers with a work of art, or media image, or artifact. What seems to be the most valuable element for the students is to develop and practice pedagogical strategies based on theory on how to engage the other with the work... We do work from reproductions in class, but we also develop art appreciation activities at least in one gallery every semester. I bring them to [the artist-run center], depending on the exhibition we have. That has been very much appreciated by the students... They get to practice these approaches with me in class... and at least one in a gallery. They develop one art appreciation activity for their peers in class and one that they develop and apply in a school setting... So, not having a gap or distance between theory and practice. (Emma, transcription, p. 27)

Emma also believes that by gaining confidence with such strategies, museum educators can begin to take more risks in their work, which will lead to more creativity:

I find that you can also be more experimental. That is something I find in our profession as art educators, very often, perhaps too often, we work with lesson plans or recipes. When you work closely with artists and when you have your own practice, we are always in a *process* of the creative act. That is something I'd like to see more... experimental proposals of art response. (Emma, transcription, p. 27)

Creative engagement through interpretive strategies is central to Emma's conception of the role of today's museum educators.

Voicing my own trajectory

When originally asked why she had agreed to participate in this project, Emma explained that she wanted to share her experiences and engage in the co-construction of knowledge in her field. Emma found participating in this life history project to be a beneficial reflective exercise that directly relates to her professional practice: "I find it allowed me to engage in a reflective process" (Emma, transcription, p. 27). By participating in this project, Emma felt that she had a chance to share her own personal experiences: "Just voicing my own trajectory" (Emma, transcription, p. 27). She finds that she does not have the time for, or a natural inclination towards, such personal history reflections:

I find that I gained a lot in activating, or trying to think about this, because, to be honest with you, I rarely stop to think about it. I am a doer, always on the road...Rather than a thinker. So, to sit down and think about how you do things. Why you do what you do. (Emma, transcription, p. 27)

Emma emphasized that it is important to participate in such reflective practices, and that she enjoyed sharing her personal experiences with me specifically, as she felt comfortable doing so.

Chapter Seven

Character Study: Robert

Opening Biography

Robert grew up with his parents, sister, and brother in Ottawa, Ontario, during the 1970s. His parents were not involved in the arts. The family did not visit museums on a very regular basis. Robert and his brother often engaged in games and play that involved imagination. As a child, Robert looked up to his older sister for her drawing abilities. This interest in his sister's drawing pushed Robert to become an avid drawer.

Robert recalls engaging with the visual arts at his elementary school, though this school did not have any specialized art classes. His elementary education did involve a number of field trips to museums, which he found to be thrilling. This school took students on museum trips approximately once a year. During high school, Robert participated in all visual arts classes. Although there were specialized art classes in his high school, Robert does not believe that the school sent art students on field trips to museums on a regular basis. His parents and his high school art teacher were very supportive of his art.

Robert earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree from the University of Ottawa, where he focused on painting and drawing and a small amount of printmaking. Soon after this, Robert acquired a position as a host at the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. At the end of that summer, he commenced a Bachelor of Education at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. He stated that he "had every intention of becoming a high school teacher" (Robert, transcription, p. 16). But, when he graduated in 1994, he needed a job. He decided to return to the Museum of Science and

Technology to continue his hosting job, while engaging in occasional supply teaching. After this, Robert secured a full-time job with the Canada Aviation Museum in 1995, as the community program assistant.

Robert really enjoyed the work he was doing, but after four years of working at the Canada Aviation Museum, he had the urge to return to teaching art. He believed it would be ideal to have a position in an art gallery. After completing a master's degree in art education in 2002, he took up a position in an art gallery in the department of visitor services. He eventually transferred to the education department in this gallery, where he now manages youth and school programs. Robert still held this position at the time of our interviews.

Robert continued to maintain a studio practice over the years, though he finds it difficult to create given his demanding work schedule. He has exhibited extensively in Ottawa and has also participated in a show in New Brunswick.

Personal Experiences

Early Museum Experiences

I liked everything

Robert recalled two field trips to museums with his elementary school. He noted that he does not remember a lot of the details from these trips but he vividly recalls enjoying the experiences in their entirety: "I just remember liking being there, just the atmosphere" (Robert, transcription, p. 1). The first visit he described was at the National Gallery of Canada. He emphasized that there were multiple aspects about being in this atmosphere that excited him:

...I just remember really liking the whole thing...I liked everything. I liked going into the cloakroom to hang up our coats and the guide brought us to the galleries. I remember thinking it was neat because we went up into the spaces and they were really dark and they had all sorts of paintings and the floor was carpeted, which was different from school. And we would sit in front of the paintings. (Robert, transcription, p. 1)

For Robert, this early museum experience was holistic and exciting.

The second experience that Robert recounted was at the Museum of Man, which is now called the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Everything seemed to be so different from his school environment, which made the visit particularly intriguing to him:

I remember liking to go there, because again it was a field trip. The building looked kind of like an old castle, and I thought that was pretty neat. Again, the environment was just different from school...It was really different, really fun, and there were actual objects that you were learning from, which I really liked. (Robert, transcription, p. 1)

For Robert, the fact that museums offered a different kind of learning environment than what he experienced daily at school was exciting and stimulated him to enjoy the visits in a holistic fashion.

Like we were scamming the system

Robert enjoyed school trips to museums as a young child so much that these atypical school experiences seemed almost too good to be true:

...to me, it seemed like... a leisure activity. I couldn't believe we got to do this leisure stuff during school time. I never thought of gym that way. We did go swimming and stuff like that, but I never thought of it quite the same way. It was almost like we were scamming the system getting to go to the museum! (Robert, transcription, p. 1)

He attributed this association with leisure to the students' having chances to engage in free choice learning during the museum experience, which was not typical of his school learning:

... you always had free time at some point. We could look at stuff. We had the option of asking questions. There was the possibility of coming across something you wouldn't come across in the classroom at school. (Robert, transcription, p. 2)

For Robert, the freedom that was associated with museum trips with his elementary school offered him an alternative learning experience that was liberating and positive.

It was a big deal

Robert recalled his early museum experiences both with his school and with his family as being special. They were out-of-the-ordinary experiences that seemed important to Robert. A major element in the apparent high significance of these events was the fact that he and his classmates or family members had to be physically transported to a location some distance from home or school. In recalling a family trip to the Museum of Science and Technology, Robert stated: "...for me it was a big deal. I was thinking "oh my god, all the way to the east end of Ottawa, on the Queensway!" It was a half-hour car ride. It seemed like a big giant trip to me" (Robert, transcription, p. 4).

At Robert's high school, there were very few field trips, which he believes was due to the fact that the classes ran on a period schedule. He can recall only one field trip with the art class. This trip was certainly special for Robert, as he was very involved with visual arts throughout high school and was even considering a career in the arts at the time. The museum that the students went to was the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; thus, they traveled quite a distance from Ottawa to Montreal. Again, this element of travel was intriguing to Robert: "That trip was fun because it was a trip to Montreal" (Robert, transcription, p. 4).

Early Out-of-Museum Art Experiences

Drawing was like a game

Robert's sister, who is four years older than him, was an avid drawer while growing up and he notes that she was particularly good at it. As mentioned in the opening biography, he recalled becoming interested in drawing while watching his sister work: "...she would always draw horses and stuff and I would draw dinosaurs. And I do remember as a kid at one point thinking that I really like this" (Robert, transcription, p. 3). During junior high school, Robert began to notice that he had the potential to excel at drawing like his sister: "...I was realizing that I like drawing and that my sister was really good at it and I could be good at it too" (Robert, transcription, p. 3). Drawing became a form of game or a competition as he aimed to surpass his sister in his drawing abilities: "...wanting to be better at it than my sister. Practicing really hard. I remember at one point I felt like I had defeated her. I was really good at it" (Robert, transcription, p. 3). Robert also noted that drawing was a playful activity filled with imagination while he was growing up:

...as a kid, drawing was like a game, it was like pretend. A lot of the games I played with my brother weren't sports games as much as they were action figures and pretending, and drawing is kind of the same thing...The whole imagination side of it was interesting to me. (Robert, transcription, p. 3)

For Robert, drawing was more than making marks on a page. He was engaging in internal and social games with elements of competition, play, and imagination.

This is my special thing

Robert recognized that he was particularly gifted at the visual arts in high school. He enjoyed the visual arts more than other subjects and he knew at that point that his talent in the arts set him apart from the other students:

By the time I was in junior high school, I remember thinking to myself that this is my special thing. I am not good at gym, I am okay at languages and stuff, but arts I was really good at. People would compliment me on my drawing ability. So, through junior high school, I kind of really persevered at doing that. (Robert, transcription, p. 3)

As he became increasingly aware of his talent in junior high school, Robert began to concentrate on the arts in his studies.

Recent Museum Experiences

Dedicated gallery space to educational displays

Robert recently visited the Denver Art Museum and was impressed with the museum's dedicated educational space within the galleries:

I really liked what they did for an art museum. They actually had these rooms where you could try on costumes, where you could open drawers and find objects, books, and stuff. So, they actually dedicated gallery space to educational displays. This was dispersed throughout the museum. (Robert, transcription, p. 5)

Robert noted that this attention to education within the gallery space sets it apart from many other art museums by making education obvious to visitors and even integral to their experiences. As he observed, this focus on hands-on education within exhibition spaces is more typically found in children's museums than large fine arts museums:

The Denver Art Museum is really sort of like, it is like the only art museum that I have been to that feels like a children's museum or a family museum. It is so strange, you go there and you think, wow, they actually target families...learning spaces, talk-back walls. (Robert, transcription, p. 6)

Robert appreciated the dedication to educational spaces in this museum, but had trouble imagining how this might occur in his current place of work since the culture is so different there.

Old-fashioned

When reflecting on recent positive museum visits, Robert referred to an experience he had at the Redpath Museum in Montreal in 2000. What made this museum stand out for him was its atypical approach to displaying artifacts:

I remember being kind of really pleasantly surprised. I remember how old-fashioned it was. You would walk through and there were all these display cases. These typed, I think they even had hand-written labels. Very old, no didactic kind of stuff. Just a bunch of display cases crammed with objects. Like, nothing was designed. I remember really liking it because it was so different from what you see now in museums. It was like the museum itself was almost like a museum of museology. I remember really liking that. I don't remember a thing about what I looked at. I liked the museum—the feeling I got there. (Robert, transcription, p. 5)

Robert found the space to have a nostalgic feeling. This experience was very different from what he encounters on a daily basis in the museum where he works. Although the space may have seemed dated, the experience was fresh to him. This novel experience was a welcome surprise for Robert.

Connected to everyday life

During a recent visit to the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), Robert was impressed by the renovations that had recently been done to the building. He felt the architect was particularly successful at fitting this exceptional, wealthy gallery into an intriguing, lower-income community that is filled with bustling life:

...I remember coming out of the AGO and thinking it is really neat that it is in Chinatown. You know! It is this fancy, expensive museum right in the middle of Chinatown. I like that. (Robert, transcription, p. 7)

He compared this to the more isolated feeling associated with his gallery due to its location on what he called a “big, empty, cold sort of space” (Robert, transcription, p. 7), although this has improved slightly recently. Robert was drawn to the location of the Art Gallery of Ontario. It is situated in a community infused with life—the hustle and bustle

of the city. This, he feels, connects the gallery to everyday life in an effective way: “...the AGO is really in the middle of a lot of life. It is a little bit more connected to everyday life, which I like” (Robert, transcription, p. 7).

Robert linked this to the gallery’s vision statement, “art matters,” which ultimately proclaims that art is important, and should be a component of our everyday lives:

And then you have their logo or their visionary statement, you know, “art matters,” which the place embodies. I like that. I actually thought that that feeling came across in the way the place was set up and the location of the building, which I know was not in their control. (Robert, transcription, p. 7)

Robert referred to the Galleria Italia, located on the north end of the second floor of the AGO. When standing in this space, visitors get the impression that they are floating above Dundas Street, where the façade of the AGO is located. Robert felt that this also emphasized that the gallery is connected to its surroundings:

You look out the window and there is this very nice neighborhood, really charming kinds of buildings. So I had this sort of overall impression. I guess it was really the building in a way and the location. Not so much what they do inside. It was all a package. (Robert, transcription, p. 7)

Robert was impressed by the AGO’s ability to connect to everyday life in how the building works with its surroundings. He noted that this admirably reflects the gallery’s vision statement.

I usually go there to recharge

When asked about a recent negative museum experience, Robert mentioned that he could only recall one such experience. He recounted a visit he made to a children’s museum with a group of students he had been working with at an art school. Although he believes that the children loved the event, his experience was not fulfilling because the

space was packed with artifacts and people: “You cram a bunch of kids together... there are boxes of things, costumes, and games, and stuff. It is like a play area. It is all well-designed and thought out and everything, but it felt kind of cramped” (Robert, transcription, p. 11). Robert recalled the museum being particularly busy, loud, and, chaotic, which is not the type of experience he aims for as a visitor:

It was a very busy place. A lot of buses, school buses coming in and out, long lineups, a lot of people, a lot of noise, like a very busy shopping mall. I am sure that museums are thrilled to have that level of visitation, but I didn't like [the experience] as a visitor. I thought it was horrible. (Robert, transcription, p. 12)

Furthermore, the museum gave only one trajectory option, forcing Robert to trudge along with the crowd and interact with the same sequence of artifacts and activities as every other visitor: “...it was just really noisy and it felt a bit like an assembly line... Like you are on this sort of... you kind of have to follow, it is like IKEA... there is one way to kind of go through it, and that is it” (Robert, transcription, p. 11).

The vast numbers of people, the cramped space, and the forced pathway made this experience stressful for Robert. As he reflected on this experience, he observed that these factors, along with the fact that he was in a supervisory position, impeded his chances of being able to relax and recharge, which is his typical reason for attending museums:

“there are different motivations—you are an explorer, you want to recharge, you are a facilitator. I guess I usually go there to recharge” (Robert, transcription, p. 12). Robert aims to engage in museum visits that leave him feeling rejuvenated. When there are factors that produce the opposite effect, there is a high potential for Robert to have a negative museum experience.

Professional Experiences

Museum Educator Preparation

Never in my wildest dreams

Growing up, Robert did not dream about becoming a museum educator, but a series of serendipitous events brought him into this profession: "...I never in my wildest dreams thought about...working in museums" (Robert, transcription, p. 16). Robert did think about becoming a teacher during his high school years. His passion for the visual arts led him to pursue a BFA at the University of Ottawa. After completing this degree, he decided that he wanted to apply to teacher's college. While completing course work to have a second teachable subject, Robert landed a part-time position as a host at the Museum of Science and Technology. He noted that he did not imagine that he would be successful in acquiring the position, but he was very happy that he did:

So, [I was] on the floor, you know, doing ad hoc interpretation, doing security. It was a glorified security guard job, but interpreting a little bit, and being at the cash register. And I really liked it. I didn't even think I was going to get the job. I just kind of went to the interview. And, they were recruiting a lot of people at the time. (Robert, transcription, p. 16)

Robert worked at this museum for about four months and then began his teaching degree at Queen's University. When he completed the degree, he needed employment and returned to the Museum of Science and Technology.

This led him to an education position at the Canada Aviation Museum (now the Canada Aviation and Space Museum) as the community program assistant. Although he did a small amount of substitute teaching while at this museum, Robert did not consider teaching in a high school again. But he did have a longing to teach art again: "I thought, well, I would kind of like to get back to teaching art...it would be great if I could get a

job at a gallery” (Robert, transcription, p. 16). Robert had heard about a graduate program in art education at Concordia University from a coworker who had recently completed the PhD program at this school. He was accepted into the master’s program and completed the degree in 2002, when he got a job in the education department at the art gallery where he continues to work today, managing the youth and school program. Thus, although Robert did not originally plan on working in museums, all of the employment he has had up until now has been with museums. He exclaimed, “I never thought of working in museums, ended up only ever working in museums so far!” (Robert, transcription, p. 17).

Professional Highlights and Challenges

Learning about audiences

One of the primary highlights of Robert’s job is having a chance to learn more about his audience members by implementing the strategies that Marianna Adams, an evaluation expert and museum consultant, introduced him to during an in-service development program:

Learning how to do audience evaluation and just going on the floor and trying out things like card sorts with visitors. You know, developing a good survey that actually gives you information that you really can use and want. (Robert, transcription, p. 18)

Robert referred to the sense of fulfillment he feels when finding an efficient evaluation strategy. He provided an example to demonstrate how he and his team members are achieving this:

So, this year, with the school programs, we developed a whole new evaluation form for teachers to fill out, which you know, we don’t worry about stuff like, grade level and what city you are from. It is more like, how well are we doing in terms of delivering key benefits. Like, on a scale of one to eight, how well did we

do in terms of teaching you something new, or getting you excited about art? So, that is kind of a neat highlight. (Robert, transcription, p. 18)

Robert is excited about finding ways to efficiently learn about his audience members and their experiences in his museum.

Fell back in love with teaching

Due to budget cuts, Robert has been asked to work directly with audiences more than ever before. He has found this to be a wonderful new highlight:

...actually this year, with budget cuts, I have been on the floor a lot more than ever before, actually doing tours and leading programs, and actually doing tours where I use Visual Thinking Strategies and other questioning strategies that I have trained staff on, but don't always get a chance to put into action...I am just working with actual people on site. It is really, really fun. (Robert, transcription, p. 18)

Robert has enjoyed the chance to actively employ the strategies he has taught his staff members—the chance to put theory into practice. He provided an example of the interactions he has experienced with this new component of his position:

...I did this one workshop with a group of kids, and they were just so much fun, and so appreciative. It was just learning how to print-make. You do printing with Styrofoam meat trays. Very simple, but the kids loved it. They made portraits of me and gave me [these] portraits. (Robert, transcription, p. 18)

With these opportunities, Robert began to reconnect with his love of teaching art, which he felt had been pushed to the side in his administrative and managerial roles:

...so it is very rewarding in a way different from the day-to-day work when you are kind of managing, you know, it is not really quite like that. That I found really, really fun, and kind of fell back in love with teaching—actually educating. Because you can get kind of far away from that when you are in an administrative role. And, as time goes by and programs grow and grow, if you are an administrator, you do less and less of the fun stuff and more of the planning. (Robert, transcription, p. 18)

With this new opportunity to engage with audience members in tours and workshops has come the need to learn more about the collections on display in the

gallery. In order to be able to effectively engage audiences with the collections, Robert has had to take more time to “learn about art history and current trends in contemporary art” (Robert, transcription, p. 19). This renewed chance to implement programming, interact with his audience members, and research the collections has been a welcome recent addition to his current position, which he has referred to as “getting back to basics” (Robert, transcription, p. 19).

Staying visitor-centered

Robert finds it to be challenging to remain centered on visitors and their experiences in his position. The daily routines and requirements associated with his job can often push the importance of remaining visitor-centered to the sidelines:

...you tend to get caught up in the details, in the day-to-day operations and stuff like that. And so, you can kind of forget that there is this whole visitor experience that you are responsible for developing. (Robert, transcription, p. 19)

Additionally, Robert has had some difficulties educating front-line staff and volunteers in visitor-centered approaches to museum education:

A couple of years ago, we did some training with guides and the volunteers, the docents, on Visual Thinking Strategies...that was challenging for me, challenging for everyone, because it is really a strategy where, the idea is, that the visitor makes their own meaning of the artwork. You kind of have to let go of telling them everything you know. So, it is kind of a paradigm shift. Some people bought it right away. Other people were kind of reluctant—with practice and with time, they kind of bought into the whole, the technique. Others always, always resisted doing VTS. (Robert, transcription, p. 19)

When there are employees and volunteers who are not enthusiastic about or willing to actively implement a strategy that Robert has taught them, such as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), Robert finds it difficult to have consistent programming: “If you develop a program where Visual Thinking Strategies is how you deliver the program and not everyone believes in it, it is really hard to get a program that is going to be delivered

in a consistent way” (Robert, transcription, p. 19). He strives to remain visitor-centered in his programming, but he finds this to be challenging due to the details of daily operations and because certain staff and volunteer members resist such approaches.

Running just to catch up

Robert would like to develop programming with more long-term goals in mind, but he finds this to be a challenge with the tasks and deadlines that often creep up on him, leaving him perpetually trying to catch up:

...trying not to lose sight of longer-term goals. You can sort of get on a hamster wheel, you know, where you are like, it sounds ridiculous, but there might be a deadline to provide text for a calendar of events and because it is a really short deadline you have left it to the last minute, you are scrambling to come up with text...in a day you write your calendar text. That becomes your programming for the next few months. And you always tell yourself, “well I’m going to really not get caught next time. I am going to plan ahead and really have a more global vision.” And, then sure enough, once you have written the text, you are on the wheel...and then, you know, comes the time for writing more calendar text and you go, “oh my, I am in the same position again.” So you are always running just to catch up. (Robert, transcription, pp. 19-20)

The practical demands of his job often leave little room for Robert to keep up to date with current thinking related to museum education. He wishes he had time to delve into contemporary museum education literature more regularly:

...just keeping current, on current thinking. You know, when I was in university...I could just read all the time about, you know, I’d read Falk and Dierking and all those people, whereas now, there isn’t a whole lot of time. (Robert, transcription, p. 20)

Robert feels that, if he and other museum educators had an opportunity to catch up on current educational practices in other galleries and in other fields, the complacency that can be associated with working in a position for a long time would be lessened:

...you tend to get comfortable in a job. So you kind of have to break the complacency. Just stay current with what other galleries are doing, what education in other fields looks like...what is current in learning theory...I think

what happens sometimes with folks that I have seen is that they do something for a long time, they have seen things cycle through, they kind of think they have seen it all, and nothing is new anymore. So, keeping things new, and exciting is really a big challenge. (Robert, transcription, p. 20)

As Robert noted, it is rare for him and his colleagues to have enough time to examine what others are doing in the field and to apply this to their own work: "...striking a balance—doing professional development and then kicking back and sort of thinking..." (Robert, transcription, p. 20). He remarked that this is often due to the normal pressure from individuals higher up on the hierarchical ladder: "...there is always external pressure. It is not like we can set our own agenda" (Robert, transcription, p. 20). Robert has to work around other people's demands and schedules, which often means that he feels as though he could use more time "just to catch up" (Robert, transcription, p. 20).

Professional Relationships

Free-choice learning situations

Robert is excited about the fact that free-choice learning is assuming a greater role in education-related programming in his museum. Rather than a more traditional "instructor-learner kind of relationship" (Robert, transcription, p. 21), Robert's museum is trying to find ways to make the museum experience more malleable and meaningful for the visitor:

...I think now we are sort of changing a little bit, trying to figure out...how can we create more sort of free-choice learning situations...It is really changing from this sort of school, instructor-learner model, to learning during leisure time. When free-choice learning is happening, you cannot control everything. So, you kind of create more of an experience than a course outline. (Robert, transcription, p. 21)

Robert offered some insight into how this type of learning situation could be supported:

So, that might mean, having a person in a space, gallery space, who is there to talk to people, and maybe there to answer questions that come from visitors' own interests. Or maybe it is developing self-guide brochures and pamphlets...People

can use that at their own pace—use part of it or all of it. (Robert, transcription, p. 21)

As Robert noted, by softening the “instructor-learner model,” the gallery is “[c]hanging sort of the hierarchy” (Robert, transcription, p. 21). A significant amount of power is being transferred over to the public, who can make choices regarding how their own learning experiences will evolve. At the same time, Robert revealed that the gallery still obviously has to maintain some authority in order to provide accurate information and guide visitors on a meaningful journey:

We are wanting to engage and involve visitors and somehow maintain authority. So, rebalancing that whole thing between authority and control and engagement with the visitors. (Robert, transcription, p. 21)

This also relates to how Robert and his colleagues are looking at the makeup of their audiences:

Maybe instead of thinking of audiences in terms of demographics, age, or income bracket, thinking of them in terms of their motivations instead. Really rethinking how you categorize learners and target them. You still are segmenting your audience, but you are doing it in a different way. (Robert, transcription, p. 21)

Robert and his colleagues are trying to categorize their audience members in more meaningful ways than the traditional method of segmenting audiences through hierarchical demographic evaluation.

Catching up with Facebook

This move towards more free-choice learning within the museum is also streaming into Robert’s museum’s work with the web. Robert is looking to reach out to audiences across Canada through the Internet. Rather than perpetuating traditional teacher-student models on the gallery’s site, Robert and his colleagues are aiming to offer free-choice learning and opportunities for users to generate content:

I think the equivalent model on the web is that teacher-pupil kind of thing, where you put information on the web and they will read it, absorb it, and there you go. Whereas...how do you kind of make it maybe a little bit more interactive and meaningful and free-choice? (Robert, transcription, p. 21)

This type of interaction on the Internet is often associated with social networking sites such as Facebook, which Robert is influenced by and is employing to develop interactive, meaningful relationships with online visitors:

You never think of Facebook as a website, you know. A website is static, almost like a book or catalogue online. So how do we create experiences that are more driven by the user and allow the user to generate content and feedback?...So you get them to engage. I guess we are kind of catching up with Facebook. (Robert, transcription, p. 22)

Robert offered an example of an idea for online program that would encompass these goals:

...instead of having lesson plans that we write, the teachers can use in the classroom to engage people in high school...do we sort of run a contest for teenagers where they will hopefully be inspired by something in our collection and then submit their own artwork? They vote on each other's. Or would you get people to vote on the gallery's worst painting? (Robert, transcription, p. 22)

The free-choice learning that Robert is promoting in his gallery and online is enabling more meaningful relationships to develop between the gallery and its visitors. As Robert noted, this offers him opportunities to engage with his audience in a “much more democratic way” (Robert, transcription, p. 22).

Audience teams

Robert and his museum educator colleagues “work *very* closely together” (Robert, transcription, p. 22). This has been particularly true recently with the shifts that have been occurring in the department. In the past, Robert recalls that museum educators worked in a fair amount of isolation from each other:

...what was going on for a long time was we had a large department and we had eight educators. Everyone was very busy, with each educator [having] their fifteen programs that they were running. People would be working, I think, alone a lot to plan their stuff. And, probably not thinking about or doing long-term planning or doing “pie in the sky” type things. But just, you know, the grind, the day-to-day grind—that hamster wheel. So for a long time, people just got along and were friendly...but people were working in isolation. (Robert, transcription, p. 22)

The education department at Robert’s museum was recently reorganized into audience teams, which has opened the doors to more collaborative work between educators:

...so three or four educators responsible for family programming, and three or four are responsible for adult programming. Individual educators will have specific programs that they are responsible for, but the hope was that with these audience teams, it would kind of get people working a little closer together, collaborating a little bit, brainstorming. (Robert, transcription, p. 22)

Since this is a relatively new shift in the department, and since the department has recently been downsized, this is still a work in progress. Robert foresees that greater collaboration will occur and will actually assist with the workload issues related to downsizing a department:

I think work issues like workload and other things make it difficult for people to [collaborate]. Now we have had staff reduction, so there is more, like we have gone from eight education officers to like four...I think in a way, people will be busier, but I think collaboration will probably be easier because it is not such a big department. (Robert, transcription, p. 22)

Robert is very supportive of the idea of working in audience teams and is a strong believer in collaboration in his job: “...I think that kind of thing leads to more discussion and creativity...collaborative work...I think people would feel more supported...You become much more efficient” (Robert, transcription, pp. 22-23).

Brought into the curatorial group

With the recent changes that have been occurring in Robert’s department, new relationships between curators and educators have evolved. In the past, “there has been

very little interaction between the education department and curatorial” (Robert, transcription, p. 23). Robert explained the typical type of relationship between educators and curators in his museum in the past: “...the model was...the exhibitions get set, curators create content for the show, the main messages, they write the catalogues. Then we get that and we format it for different audiences” (Robert, transcription, p. 23). Now, the education department has “been brought into the curatorial group” (Robert, transcription, p. 23). He noted that nothing has changed in terms of where curators or educators are located in the gallery, but both curators and educators are now considered to be part of the same group. He referred to this as a philosophical shift: “the message is you are all one kind of group” (Robert, transcription, p. 23). Robert mentioned an example of how this change affected exhibition planning for one show:

...the educators in our department who are responsible for the programming for that show have worked in really close collaboration with the curators and also with the marketing department and the exhibition managers who mount the show...And I think they really liked it and it has worked very well. It has become a model on how things should be done. (Robert, transcription, pp. 23-24)

Although curators and educators are part of the same team now, and although some changes have occurred because of this, Robert noted that he does not feel that the culture has changed very much. The status of educators in the museum has remained the same.

With this greater emphasis on museum education in his museum, Robert feels that educators now have to help their curator colleagues become more aware of audience needs:

...I think educators have to simply take on the challenge of educating colleagues about audience needs, and then persuading colleagues to let us try new things—being visitor advocates. This is a big job in some ways. (Robert, transcription, p. 24)

Robert sees great potential for the recent shifts in the infrastructure of his museum to promote collaboration and raise the status of education.

They are the DJs

When reflecting on how curatorial decisions affect his job, Robert stated, “on a basic level, they determine what we are doing” (Robert, transcription, p. 25). He noted that the type of show that is curated will affect the form that the educational programming will take:

Our programs have to reflect the changes...it also can affect the scope of your work in the sense that, well, maybe it will be a really scholarly sort of summer show...we’ll decide that maybe the key audience for that one is adults. But, because it is a summer show, we might want to have something for kids that would be interesting, so what could we do for kids that could relate to that?...There was a show...about contemporary art that is all interactive. So if we develop a program for that exhibition, we certainly don’t want it to be [a] didactic, expository tour. (Robert, transcription, p. 25)

Robert offered an intriguing metaphor to illustrate his conception of the curator-educator dynamic and roles:

They kind of, they are DJs. They pick the songs that are going to be playing. You have got to figure out, okay, this is a slow dance, we are going to lower the lights. At this point there should be a disco ball...(Robert, transcription, p. 25)

For Robert, curators make primary decisions and educators respond to them in sensitive ways that support the notions behind curatorial choices.

Museum Educator Roles and Education

Visitor advocate

Robert views museum educators as audience experts who have the tools and skills to understand and engage publics in meaningful museum experiences:

I think educators are supposed to be, or have been and will continue to be, this visitor advocate and kind of this expert on audiences. You know, I do think that museums, they rely on their education department to bring people in, to know

what the needs of visitors are, to be able to respond to them. (Robert, transcription, p. 25)

For Robert, educators play a highly important role in the art museum, in that they are experts in communicating with audiences. He sees this role as undergoing a change from developing educational programming that communicates a particular message or narrative to audiences towards facilitating experiences that are more open-ended and dependent upon the visitors themselves: “I think more and more, the role is changing...it is not just education, [we] are charged with creating visitor experiences. A more seamless, integrated experience” (Robert, transcription, p. 26). Robert believes that the role of today’s art museum professionals, including museum educators, is to develop holistic, intuitive experiences for visitors that support free-choice learning. He sees effective websites as a potential metaphor for this:

People always talk about how good websites are kind of intuitive and cohesive, so you want a visitor experience to be kind of the same thing. So, I think our role, and other people’s role, everyone who works in museums, more and more they are trying to create these visitor experiences, where you have a very, in the words that our director used, useful, the museum becomes a useful tool. It becomes easy to use...It can respond to the needs of a lot of different types of people in a lot of different ways. (Robert, transcription, p. 26)

Robert offered an example of such an integrated museum experience:

In terms of education, for a concrete example, you know it is not just now doing school tours or showing a painting where you showcase a technique. We might want to create, develop audiences, where we plan events...where you have Thursdays or Fridays, or Nuit Blanche, or whatever, where you open up the museum and there is music and there is a bar and there are interesting guest speakers, and there is art. So, you create this kind of social experience. A really fun leisure activity. It will draw an audience that doesn’t normally come, or a loyal audience. (Robert, transcription, p. 26)

By providing alternative experiences that are focused on visitor experiences and free-choice learning, Robert feels that art museums will be able to develop positive learning

and social situations for uninitiated audience members as well as art museum enthusiasts. In his opinion, this is a major component of the contemporary role of not only art museum educators but art museum professionals in general. Art museum educators are the advocates for these diverse visitors in this vision.

How exhibitions are developed

Robert believes that art museum educators are taking an increasingly important role in the development of exhibitions:

I think educators are going to be really key in sort of getting interpretive planning to become how exhibitions are developed...I think departments of education are playing more and more of a role just rooting that as a practice in art galleries. (Robert, transcription, pp. 26-27)

He noted the importance of this role in art museums specifically, as art can be interpreted in so many ways. Robert feels that art educators need to help museums pull out primary goals and benefits for visitors and find ways to make artwork interpretation accessible:

I think it is really, really unlikely that you can just hang a show and have people go through it and draw from that the story you are trying to tell...I really believe that people interpret artwork differently, their own individual way. So, imagine you have got an exhibition with a hundred different artworks, they can each be interpreted in a million different ways. And then, you are trying to tell a story. I think interpretive planning, it is not that you want to control...But I still think you need some kind of an interpretive plan to at least identify what the thesis of your show is, what the main messages are, or what the key benefits of the show are. And then to kind of try to find ways to implement those. (Robert, transcription, pp. 26- 27)

Robert offered an example of how this might be done:

So, maybe down the road you will see exhibitions where there isn't a tiny label by a painting, but there will be maybe a very basic sentence that sums it up for someone who is just interested. Maybe more detailed panels for someone who is more of an expert. And then, maybe, you know, the catalogue in the exhibition space for someone who really wants to sit there and read. (Robert, transcription, p. 27)

For Robert, educators in museums are charged with the task of pinpointing the thesis and key benefits of an exhibition and to locate entry-points for a variety of audience members to interact with and interpret the artworks in their own ways.

A foundation

Robert believes that a foundation in related theories is essential for museum educators to be effective in their jobs:

Well, I think that if you are going to be a museum educator, you really need to know theories of knowledge and learning and maybe a bit of communication theory. It is good to have that as a foundation...I think even more than art history, or whatever, I think that is really key. (Robert, transcription, p. 27)

Furthermore, Robert sees knowledge of audience research and interpretive planning as important for entry-level museum educators:

Knowing how to do audience research I think is really important...I think you need to know that to be a good educator in a museum. You need to know interpretive planning, and know how to do it. (Robert, transcription, p. 27)

This *knowing how* to implement interpretive planning along with teaching strategies is important for museum educators, according to Robert. He believes it can be acquired through internship experiences:

I think it would be really good to have, like a practicum...I think...when you do teacher trainings...and you have to...learn about the curriculum...You learn about how to write a lesson plan...It is when you have a practicum, you actually have to implement all that kind of stuff. It all comes together. You get a sense of how things are weighted. (Robert, transcription, p. 27)

Through engaging in internships, Robert believes that pre-service art museum educators will have ideal situations to put theory into practice and acquire the hands-on skills required in these positions.

See where things are sort of headed

Robert feels that inquiring into what theorists and other museums are doing in terms of education is important for museum educators: "...keep on benchmarking and seeing what other places are doing. Finding models that you like, really figuring out what it is you like about them and why" (Robert, transcription, p. 27). According to Robert, one effective method for museum educators to be exposed to what is going on in the museum education world is to have specialized instructors hold workshops both within and outside of the museum:

I think it is important to have trainers come in and train you. I think it is important to have retreats every now and again, it doesn't have to be all the time... It is really good to go away on trainings... I think the more training you go to where other people gather, or conferences, the more you meet other people and you kind of go, oh, other people have the same set of issues and challenges, the same sort of programs almost, just given different names. You can see where things are sort of headed. (Robert, transcription, p. 28)

Robert shared an example of professional development program that he participated in, which he found to be particularly effective at helping him see possibilities for the field and his particular position:

I did a training on Visual Thinking Strategies. That was a nice training because it was teaching how to do a specific technique, a questioning strategy, but through that, you learned about the theory behind it... that was fun, because there were high school teachers and there were gallery educators from parts of the States who were there. (Robert, transcription, p. 28)

By engaging with educators from a variety of museums and other learning institutions, Robert feels that museum educators will become more aware of what is occurring in the field and able to engage in invigorating exchanges with like-minded individuals, which can lead to positive change in their work.

Stepping back and looking from above

Robert viewed this life history research process as being “essentially reflective” (Robert, transcription, p. 28). Participating in this project gave him the time and space to reflect on the previous experiences that have brought him to where he is today and on where his priorities and values lie:

...I think it is really helpful to take stock of where you have been, what has been valuable, you know, what wasn't so important. When you think about all of the years you have been working, out of all the time, there are all these little highlights. So, the important stuff kind of comes to the foreground...it is a bit of a stepping back and looking from above activity, which makes you see the bigger picture. (Robert, transcription, p. 28)

Stepping back and examining priorities helped Robert to reflect on the direction that he may take his work in the future:

...I think it can help you clarify your future choices and the direction of what you should be doing...as a process, I think it can help you, just for yourself, well, what is key, what is important, what should be, where should the focus be, where should my focus be?...that is a key benefit for me. (Robert, transcription, p. 28)

Robert shared that it is easy to get caught up in day-to-day aspects of museum work, and projects such as this can enable one to observe the larger picture—what it is one is doing and why: “I find it very easy to get the nose to the grindstone, you kind of get lost in the minutiae, and...you don't see the big picture” (Robert, transcription, p. 28). For Robert, this process helped him step back to look at the global picture of his work and the key benefits and motivations he associates with his work—pulling him out of the tendency to focus on the tiny details.

Chapter Eight

Character Study: Me

Opening Biography

I was born in Scarborough, a municipality within the city of Toronto, in 1980. My mother was a professional artist in my early years. She graduated from the Ontario College of Art (OCA) in the same year that she gave birth to me. In the early 1980s, my father was a professional musician and worked in a variety of fields. My brother was born in the same municipality in 1982. My mother, father, brother, and I stayed in Scarborough until I started school in 1984. At that point, we moved to Markham, which is about a twenty-minute drive north of Scarborough.

In the early 1980s, my parents both became real estate agents to support the family, as they found it very difficult to make ends meet in the arts. Yet art remained an important part of my childhood. My mother continued to paint and my father continued to make music. I was mesmerized by my mother's artistic practice. We often painted side by side. My mother would set up still life scenes for me to paint and we would occasionally head out into nature to work *en plein air*. My brother was not as interested in creating art. He was far more involved in physical education and sports of all kinds, and eventually became a business marketer. However, he was, and still is, very interested in viewing and engaging with art and visits art museums on a very regular basis.

I recall being drawn to the visual arts in elementary school and receiving praise for my artwork from my peers and teachers early on. I enjoyed working on artistic projects in school, but I recall them being few and far between. We did not have a specialist art teacher, nor was there a dedicated art room in my elementary school.

However, I do recall visiting natural history and art museums and galleries several times throughout my elementary school years. I was enthusiastic about other subjects in elementary school as well, such as science, math, English, and physical education.

It was in high school that I became serious about the visual arts. My high school had quite a good visual arts program. I took every visual art course offered by the school. I thoroughly enjoyed these classes—the studio components, the field trips, and the art historical content. I received a lot of attention from my teachers, my classmates, and the school administration for my work. At the same time, I was very involved in science and mathematics courses. I had great difficulty deciding whether to pursue art or science in my university education. In the end, I chose science and decided to study life sciences at the University of Toronto.

My first year at the University of Toronto was quite a shock. There were two thousand students in my biology course—the same number of students who were in my entire high school. In the first class, the professor, who I could hardly see in the massive auditorium, candidly asked the class how many students wanted to become doctors. Nearly every student raised his or her hand, including me. He bluntly stated that less than five percent of us would succeed, and advised us to create a plan B. So there I was, realizing I was merely a number, and probably not part of that five percent. I was taking a course called Visual Culture in the Department of Fine Arts at the time, which I adored. In my second year, I decided to switch into a specialist program in fine art history. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. I thrived.

At the end of my degree, I applied to the Master's program in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. When I was accepted into

the program, I enthusiastically moved to Montreal in 2004. My research focused on museum education throughout my Master's degree. A series of opportunities in museums also arose during this degree. In 2007, I began the doctoral program at Concordia University, again in the Department of Art Education. I worked as the first educational coordinator at the Faculty of Fine Art (FOFA) Gallery and taught a number of courses to undergraduate art education students and generalist teacher candidates.

I maintained an artistic practice throughout my master's and doctoral degrees. During these degrees, my artwork, in the form of paintings, videos, installations, and performances, focused primarily on my identity as a biracial Canadian. I also worked with arts-based research to explore my identity as a museum educator and the identities of other museum educators (Reid, 2009).

Personal Experiences

Early Museum Experiences

It felt really special

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I recalled my visit to the National Gallery of Canada at the age of ten. I will return to this pivotal memory here, and will examine the meaning behind the event.

My grade four class drove to Ottawa on a bus in the spring, with a number of teachers and parent chaperones, one of whom was my mother. It was certainly the most substantial field trip I had ever been on at the time and the longest drive I had experienced. We stayed in Ottawa at Carleton University for a few days, and had the opportunity to share a dorm with our friends, which I found very exciting: "I was really excited about going to Ottawa because we had a chance to room with our friends. At ten

years old...we got to be by ourselves in a little dorm...so it felt really special” (Natasha, transcription, p. 1). Our visit to the National Gallery of Canada was certainly the highlight of my trip. The majestic nature of the building blew me away:

Of course, we went to the National Gallery, which is *huge*. It was definitely the biggest museum I had been to. I adored it...At first I was, not scared, but slightly intimidated because of how large the space is. I thought I could get lost in there and was holding onto my mom very closely. (Natasha, transcription, p. 1)

This novelty of being in a city far from home and experiencing the massive, awe-inspiring architecture of the gallery contributed to my sentiment that this was a particularly special trip.

He didn't speak down to us

During our gallery visit, an exceptional museum educator guided us. What was so impressive about this museum education experience was that the guide engaged us in a dialogue, where our opinions were central to the learning experience: “He was really welcoming and didn't speak down to us” (Natasha, transcription, p. 1). This guide introduced us to the polemics surrounding one of the artworks at that time:

I remember he asked us what we thought of it, so he really brought our own perspectives into it. He wanted to know if we liked it, if it was something we would want in our house. I was really impressed by that. Usually somebody tells you what to think and he wanted to know what we thought. (Natasha, transcription, p. 1)

The guide created a relationship with the entire group. He made us feel that we were part of a community within this large space, making the space seem more palpable for young children:

...he wanted us all to discuss this together, so he brought a kind of closeness to this experience rather than the museum appearing to be huge and unwelcoming for small children. He kind of made the museum seem like it was a smaller space by bringing us all together in a little circle. (Natasha, transcription, p. 2)

The human interaction with this guide made the museum experience particularly rewarding. His ability to engage us in dialogues that had typically been restricted to adults and to develop a sense of togetherness in this large space made me feel connected to the museum in a meaningful way.

The educator also guided us on an experiential journey, based on an optical illusion:

...he was asking us to stare at it for a long time until our eyes would cross and blur... There was an optical illusion where the red kind of comes out. Then he told us the name, *The Voice of Fire*... these colors coming at you that almost look like fire. I thought it was an amazing experience. I felt almost part of the painting because we also had a long period of time to spend with it. (Natasha, transcription, p. 2)

Thus, the guide brought us into a dialogue with the painting through active engagement.

The excitement of the trip

When recalling a trip to the OCAD gallery that I took with my mother when I was just three years old, I remembered details from our travel from home to the gallery. I recalled preparing my purse and the excitement of taking a new form of transportation:

...what I remember is my reversible purse, which was awesome. One side had all these colors. The other side had all these mini flowers and you could reverse it completely. So, I was playing with that. I had this bright green apple in it, and that was very important. It was the only thing I had in this purse. We took the streetcar to go there, and I thought that was exciting. So this whole experience of going somewhere and just the excitement of the trip. (Natasha, transcription, p. 3)

Another source of my excitement was the fact that we were going to the place where my mother had gone to school to learn about art. She had prepared me for this trip by telling me that we would be seeing the work of art students, and that she had been in their position not long ago.

About the space

I was particularly enthusiastic about going to the building where my mother had gone to school—this academic building was the highlight of my trip:

I remember the building more than I remember the artworks. I remember walking through the spaces and thinking this was special—this is where my mom went to school, this is where people make things that I make at home, but they do it so they have a career in it. So I thought it was really special and important. (Natasha, transcription, p. 3)

The aesthetic qualities of the space seemed ideal for artistic creation:

It was about this artsy lighting. This kind of soft, glowing light that would be especially good to create in. Like, where you would have your canvas or your drafting board. I loved that. I loved the smell of the building. It reminded me of my mom's work area at home, where all the paints were and all the pencils. (Natasha, transcription, p. 4)

The feeling of the space is what stays in my memory. I recall acknowledging that this space was unlike any other I had ever been in: “There was this old characteristic to this space. Ever since that experience, I always saw art spaces as really something special, like where you create” (Natasha, transcription, p. 3).

In this and similar experiences, the history of the buildings, along with the overall feeling they left me with were essential. My mother provided me with historical information that she was excited about prior to and during the trips, which naturally sparked my interest, contributing to the great joy that I took in navigating in these spaces.

Very validating

Between the ages of fifteen and twenty, I went on three trips to New York City with my family. Museums were always at the center of these vacations. I distinctly recall the first time we went to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). I was mesmerized by the number of artists and specific artworks that I was able to recognize from art class, from

art books in my home, and from popular culture. This was an exciting and validating experience: Every time I saw a work I had seen before I said, “‘I know that!’ It felt very validating” (Natasha, transcription, p. 7). This feeling of validation was further emphasized when I explained what I knew about the artworks to my family members:

I was also explaining a lot of the works to my parents and brother. That was special. It made it more important for them. My mom knew a lot already, and she would help too. But my dad and my brother, they didn’t have those experiences as their background knowledge. So I was a little teacher to them. (Natasha, transcription, p. 7)

My family members noted my obvious love of art history. We collectively started to dream about my future career in the arts. While in New York, we would imagine me working in a variety of arts-centered locations:

...we would pass by places like the Guggenheim and they would ask if I could imagine myself working here. We passed by Sotheby’s, the auction house, my mom would always be like, “you’re going to work here.” It’s so funny. Other parents would say, “you’re going to be a lawyer, and you’re going to be a doctor” and mine said, “you’re going to work here”... We kind of fantasized. (Natasha, transcription, p. 7)

Early museum experiences that offered me an opportunity to connect with artworks that I had previously studied validated my knowledge. Furthermore, such experiences validated my excitement for the visual arts, leading my family and me to dream about potential careers I could have in the art world.

Early Out-of-Museum Art Experiences

Art is your number one

As mentioned in the opening biography, art was an important part of my childhood. However, I have very few detailed memories of making art simply for pleasure at home. Most of my vivid memories of making art are related to school assignments or activities. I recall receiving praise for a piece that I had worked on for a

class assignment in grade six, which I believe asked us to draw a building. I drew the Fred Varley house on Main Street, Unionville. I was proud of the graphite rendition of the building. My mother had also depicted this structure in one of her paintings. I believe she was either working on this painting at the same time that I created the graphite drawing or had recently completed the work. In the following year, I worked on a clay polar bear sculpture in art class. Again, I recall receiving attention for this work, from my peers, teachers, and parents. Around this time, I was invited to paint a panel for the fencing around the construction site for the Fred Varley Art Gallery.

In high school, I became much more serious about the arts. My high school was known for being quite advanced in the visual arts: “We had a lot of supplies and big studio spaces, so I was lucky with that” (Natasha, transcription, p. 5). The most memorable assignment was a yearlong project in my final year where we were asked to create a series of works using a style inspired by a well-known artist. I created five portraits in a style inspired by the work of Chuck Close. I received significant praise for the work throughout the year, and especially at the year-end exhibition. The school administration asked if they could purchase the work from me, which I declined.

It wasn't always an easy decision to stick with art in high school. At times, I felt that I could learn technique outside of school in order to focus more on math and science, which I also did well in. When it came time to decide on the direction of my postsecondary studies, I struggled, hesitating between life sciences and the arts. It was actually my physics teacher who encouraged me to stick with the arts:

I do remember people saying, “if you can do it [life sciences], then you should do it.” My physics teacher actually said the opposite: “you could do science but you aren't going to be happy, so you should stick with art”...He would always say,

“you know you are good at physics, but you have to remember that art is your number one”. (Natasha, transcription, p. 6)

I had many early art experiences outside of the museum setting that were very encouraging, reinforcing my love for art. This encouragement came from family members, peers, and teachers.

Recent Museum Experiences

A learning playground

When recalling recent positive museum experiences, the first trip that I made to the Centre Georges Pompidou, a Parisian contemporary art museum, library, and research complex, first sprang to my mind. My first visit to Paris was in 2008, which was also the first time that I visited the Pompidou. Upon seeing the building, I was overwhelmed by excitement. To me, the architecture evoked a playful tone, and I connected with it:

... I was flabbergasted. Just getting out of the metro. It was so different from everything else in Paris. It was so new compared to the other buildings... I loved it... All these exposed parts, turned inside-out. I remember standing in line, looking outside, then entering the space. It is almost a playground when you walk in—the neon lights and so on. There was something about this playful space that I was attracted to. (Natasha, transcription, pp. 7-8)

The artwork displayed in the Pompidou reflected this playful tone of the architecture. I was drawn to the children’s gallery, which featured the work of Édouard Sautai. The works on display were photographs of miniature installations set up in real-life environments. These installations appeared to be life-sized due to the way that Sautai placed them in the environment. The artwork and the exhibition design were very playful and catered to children’s interests and needs:

There is a little mini gallery for children. I thought it was the most amazing thing because they had all the artworks at the eye height of the children and all the activities were right there for them to work with. So, it wasn’t, you know, kind of second-class artworks. It was really interesting stuff... They had this amazing

setup... They had a big scene on a semicircle with different types of scenes, nature, city, all mingled together. There was a camera... You have all these toys at one end, with all these colors... you could create these scenes, and the angle of it would make it look as though it is in the scene behind [it]. So it was the same concept of Sautai. It had that concept of choosing your angle... It was really interactive and the artworks were really interesting, which I found to be inspiring. (Natasha, transcription, pp. 7-8)

For me, this small gallery was an interactive tool “to make kids curious and want to find out more” (Natasha, transcription, p. 9). It was a place for children to play and explore making connections with contemporary art.

From the moment I laid eyes on the Centre Pompidou, I was engaging in a playful dialogue with architecture and art. The exterior and interior architecture, the chosen artworks, the setup of the works, and the interactive components all worked together to create a stimulating, playful experience.

Excluded from the experience

Interestingly, my recent negative museum experience was at the same place where I had an early positive museum experience: the National Gallery of Canada. In 2009, I went to the gallery for the first time since my initial experience there with my grade four class. I had high expectations for the experience, as I wanted to “rekindle the connection I had with the artwork and the space” (Natasha, transcription, p. 10). My expectations were not met, as a series of events and realities made me feel anything but connected to the artworks and the space.

The difficulties started the moment I walked in. Numerous people had told me that the gallery visit would be free, which it was not. Following this initial surprise, the greatest issue I had was an inability to locate the artwork that I was primarily there to see:

The Voice of Fire:

I spent a lot of time looking for the *Voice of Fire*, and asking people where it was. Everyone was telling me a different story. Then I decided to just walk around and try to experience what I [could] see there...A while later, I finally was able to speak to a guard, who said that the *Voice of Fire*...was up, but that section was completely closed off to the public and there was no way that I could see it. (Natasha, transcription, p. 10)

After giving me this obviously disappointing information, the guard scolded me for not checking my shoulder bag on the first floor, which was very frustrating: "...he said, 'by the way, you should have checked your bag!' So, it's like another thing. He said that I couldn't go back into the gallery without checking my bag" (Natasha, transcription, p. 10). After checking my bag, I entered a contemporary gallery space that had a work by Chuck Close, one of my favorite artists. The events that occurred were less than agreeable:

I found a Chuck Close work, and I am obsessed with Chuck Close. I had never actually seen one in person before. So I was so happy. So I took a picture of it, because that is what you are allowed to do in all these museums I had recently been to in Paris. I didn't give it a second thought. A security guard came over and started yelling at me...I said I was sorry, and that I was used to places where I was allowed to take photos...He wasn't very nice. Then I felt like someone was always watching me very closely. All of a sudden, I was in this very "special" place that I didn't belong in. (Natasha, transcription, p. 10)

Following this, I tried to visit more contemporary work in another gallery, but was disturbed by the construction that was occurring at the time:

They were renovating, so there were huge sections of the museum that were closed. That area was so noisy, there was so much hammering and drilling. These sounds went into different galleries...I couldn't concentrate on my experience. (Natasha, transcription, p. 10)

At this point, I had been in the gallery for a while and was very hungry. I went to the restaurant but found out that all the menu items had gluten in them. As I am gluten-intolerant, that meant that I could not eat anything:

It was just one thing after the other, where I felt like I was being excluded from the experience, like I didn't belong...Not that I expect a gallery to have gluten-free foods...It was just one other thing that made me feel excluded from the experience. (Natasha, transcription, p. 10)

When reflecting on the experience, I realized that it would have been more positive if there had been clarity regarding what the gallery was offering that day and what was expected of me as a visitor. Furthermore, I felt restricted and excluded in many of the situations that occurred, which prevented me from playfully engaging with the art and the space.

Professional Experiences

Museum Educator Preparation

It just felt right

Nearing the end of my specialist degree in fine art history at the University of Toronto, I began to inquire into graduate programs that would prepare me for work in the museum world, and the program at Concordia University caught my attention: "So, I was looking at programs and I saw that there was this art education program in Montreal, where they did have professors who worked with museums..." (Natasha, transcription, p. 14). I applied to the program and was accepted. During the summer before I moved to Montreal, I worked at the Art Gallery of Ontario as an art educator in its art camp program, which reaffirmed my desire to focus on museum education for my master's degree:

...I loved it, absolutely adored it, and was really glad I did that because it reaffirmed my reasons for wanting to go into museum education...I knew right away. It was kind of strange that I knew that I wanted to do museum education right away. Usually I was not sure of which direction I wanted to go in. (Natasha, transcription, p. 14)

When I arrived in Montreal and began my studies in art education in 2004, “opportunities started to open up” (Natasha, transcription, p. 14). I was invited by Dr. Paul Langdon to work with the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) on a research panel consisting of museum educators, teachers, community workers, and curators. This created an opportunity for me at the CCA, where I worked with the director of education as a research intern. Following this experience, a close friend’s sister introduced me to La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse (La Centrale). They were searching for an outreach educational programmer, and I was a perfect fit. I worked with La Centrale from 2006 to 2009 and completed my master’s thesis on the programming that I was developing there in 2007. During my doctoral degree, I worked with the Faculty of Fine Arts Gallery, first as a research intern, then as the first educational coordinator and as a supervisor for student interns. “All of those experiences brought me to where I am. I was being pulled along. It just felt right” (Natasha, transcription, p. 15).

Professional Highlights and Challenges

A chance to share stories

One of the major highlights of my work as a museum educator is the opportunity to hear about the connections between visitors’ museum experiences and their previous life experiences and knowledge. Through this, the visitors’ stories are viewed as powerful components of the museum experience, redistributing power between the museum and the visitors. An example of my experience with visitors sharing their stories occurred with a community group that I worked with at La Centrale. The group was from the Immigrant Workers’ Centre of Montreal, and particularly the Skills for Change program, which introduces basic computer technologies to new immigrants:

We did a project with them where we brought contemporary photography into the community center...and introduced digital cameras. Some of them had never worked with digital cameras before and that was really an interesting opportunity for people to start experimenting. The stories that came out of there were amazing. I just remember one woman was telling us that she had just moved from the Philippines and found out after she moved that she was pregnant and her husband was still living in the Philippines and he had never seen her pregnant belly. So, she took a picture of her belly to send to him. She never thought that that was something that could be possible...It's these touching stories that you hear when you are teaching. (Natasha, transcription, p. 16)

The participant was thrilled to share her story with the gallery members and her classmates. She clearly appreciated this opportunity to share and I was touched by her narrative and grateful that she contributed it.

It is like an artwork

Another highlight of my work is the opportunity to generate ideas with colleagues during brainstorming sessions:

...I have been lucky that the recent museum education settings I have been working with the director or programmer or curator, and sometimes the artists. I love those times when you get to sit down and bounce ideas off each other. (Natasha, transcription, p. 17)

I get a thrill from working with these colleagues to develop programming ideas that are meaningful and amusing: "I think it is like an artwork when you are coming up with it" (Natasha, transcription, p. 17). An example of a successful, stimulating brainstorming session that I experienced was with Lynn Beavis, the director of the FOFA Gallery at the time I was working there:

It was the end-of-the-year exhibit for...graduate students. It is an exhibit where there are many different types of artworks and I had to make links between them. So we thought about what graduating means. It is a transition, a celebration...and cake kept coming up [in our discussion]...I remember sitting there with Lynn and bouncing these ideas off of her and coming up with this idea of cake. (Natasha, transcription, p. 17)

Out of this brainstorming session we developed an artist talk with a panel of three artists working with cake, and then a cake-decorating workshop. The idea took shape during our brainstorming. The collaborative process was essential to the development of the idea: “It wouldn’t have happened if we were sitting by ourselves” (Natasha, transcription, p. 17). This generation of meaningful and stimulating ideas during collaborative brainstorming sessions with colleagues and partners is a major highlight in my work as a museum educator.

Being around contemporary art

Being surrounded by contemporary art and learning about this work is another primary highlight of my work in museums: “I love being around the contemporary art world when I am in a museum or a gallery” (Natasha, transcription, p. 17). This naturally connects me to my background in art history. During my undergraduate degree, I discovered my passion for contemporary art history and have continuously sought to nurture this passion. Furthermore, I feel that I have enabled my studies in contemporary art history to leap forward in my work as a museum educator, as I have had multiple opportunities to work directly with artists:

I remember when the Jake Moore exhibit was on at the FOFA Gallery, when the director at the time asked me to go to visit Jake at her studio. I thought, this is awesome! I get to go and see the artists in their space and talk to him or her about the way they work. It feels like I am taking my museum-going experiences a step further by being with the artists in their world. (Natasha, transcription, p. 17)

This chance to work directly with contemporary art and artists is a highly fulfilling part of my work.

Trying to convince

The majority of my work in museum education has been conducted in small gallery settings where I have had to play a wide variety of roles. The task I have found to be most challenging is finding and securing visitors from a variety of community settings:

...basically, finding visitors is like marketing. Trying to hold people in. Trying to convince community groups that this space is for them and useful and that they will enjoy it...once you get them in, it is pretty easy to get them to come back. They realize that it is for them. Sometimes it is just hard to get people to come in. (Natasha, transcription, pp. 17-18)

The often-tedious process of cold-calling community centers to promote programming is clearly a challenge for me in my work as a community outreach educator:

...cold-calling and not getting any response. I might go through a hundred people. I find that frustrating. I think at times I should try another tactic. I know I tried that at La Centrale—just cold-calling. It takes a *lot* of time...that is hard. (Natasha, transcription, p. 17)

I noted that I have the same feeling about developing and delivering brochures only to hear back from a very small number of interested groups—or possibly none at all: “I mean even creating brochures. It is fun, but if people don’t respond, it is hard” (Natasha, transcription, p. 18). This reality was particularly difficult at La Centrale, where I was volunteering: “I am a volunteer at La Centrale, so I can’t put thirty hours in every week marketing” (Natasha, transcription, p. 18).

As an educator engaging in outreach education at galleries, I believe that community members’ needs and interests should come first. When engaging with the Immigrant Workers’ Centre, it was clear that they wanted to ensure that the gallery’s educational programming supported their mandate to provide their participants with computer skills for the workforce and insight into workers’ rights. Although I would

certainly consider her to be very progressive and supportive, the gallery programmer warned me to not veer away from a contemporary art focus. She insisted that she did not want the gallery to become a community center, disconnected from the contemporary art world. I wanted to find a happy medium, but this made her slightly nervous. When attempting to essentially “sell” programming to uninitiated publics, it is essential to align the programming to their needs, but gallery programmers, curators, or directors can sometimes see this as a threat.

Marketing to nontraditional publics can be a daunting task when there are so many other duties that are associated with museum education positions including curriculum and policy development, teaching, grant-writing, and so on. This is especially true for educators working in small galleries with very limited funding. Additionally, catering to the needs of these diverse publics can clash with the goals of other professionals working in these galleries.

Professional Relationships

Meaning through the interactions

The relationship that I try to create with my visitors is one where meaning-making is central. To achieve this, I engage visitors in active discussions and interactions:

Meaning through the interactions. And active learning. So, avoiding the walk and talk, or walk and gawk kind of tour, where you are bored out of your mind because this person is talking about personally meaningless facts. So...I want people to feel they are involved...I guess, with that, I like to place the power into the hands of the visitor or participant—where learning is really happening because of them, because it is meaningful to them...(Natasha, transcription, p. 19)

An example of how I have achieved this in the past is a workshop that focused on the personal experiences of a group of high school students and placed a significant amount of power into their hands:

...[in] the *vitrines* (window space) were all these tiny, these little worlds that the artist made that consisted of layers and layers of fabric and felts. On top of these mountains of fabrics there were these tiny tents that would show up...you could imagine that there may be little creatures living inside these tents...We talked about tents and what they mean—about forts and all those things you got to do when you were a kid, or hopefully got to do when you were a kid...we were trying to imagine who would be living in these tents. And, what kinds of creatures they would be...So they made these little sculptures out of clay and they would have to be able to fit within these small tents theoretically. I had them leave them in the space of the gallery. So they had these little mini sculptures in the gallery, and it became part of the exhibit...[The exhibition in the gallery space was about] leaving a trace of yourself in space and time. So, by leaving them in there, it was like leaving their mark in some way...They got to leave a part of themselves there. (Natasha, transcription, p. 19)

By drawing on visitors' personal past experiences through dialogue and active engagement, I aim to develop visitor-centered relationships that focus on meaning-making and even empowerment.

Over coffee

My relationships with curators, directors, and programmers in my work have been “very positive—so positive that we have chosen to be friends outside of the workplace” (Natasha, transcription, pp. 20-21). While working at the FOFA Gallery, I developed a strong relationship with the director:

...when I was working at the FOFA Gallery, what was great was that every single day...the director and I would discuss programming and what was going on in our lives, in our positions, over coffee, every single day. And, I think that was really special and I would hope that could continue in other positions. Maybe not every day, but at least an ongoing collaboration and commitment to each other, because it makes such a difference in the dynamic. It is totally different from if you were in your own little bubble. (Natasha, transcription, p. 21)

These convivial moments that occurred each morning that I worked at the FOFA Gallery were so pleasurable and productive. This is when the director and I brainstormed about programming for events, possibilities for collaborations, and reflections on past events.

Relevant information from our daily lives was also interspersed throughout these conversations over coffee or tea.

With the exception of my work on the *Anne Savage: The Living Spirit and Her Legacy* exhibition at the FOFA Gallery, which was a special show curated by art educators Dr. Paul Langdon and Dr. Leah Sherman, I was not involved in curatorial decisions nor was educational programming considered in curatorial programming. I have always wanted to become more involved in the development of exhibitions in order to assist in bridging the gap between curatorial endeavors and educational endeavors, and I imagine this may become a more common practice in museums in the future. However, because she made time for these informal sessions, it was clear to me that the director valued education in her gallery, as well as my own visions and opinions.

The central point

For me, curatorial decisions are essential to educational programming:

I think that the curatorial decisions are *really* important because they really determine the flow of a visit or an experience and it is the central point of what is going on in an exhibit but also in an educational program. (Natasha, transcription, p. 22)

How the works are displayed and how the space is set up often determines the focus of the educational programming that I develop. This is especially true for the small spaces that I have worked in. For example, when developing programming for the *Reverse Engineering* exhibit, which featured the work of Jake Moore, I was drawn to the central podium in the exhibit. Moore had scanned branches of trees a number of times and she showcased large prints of these throughout the exhibit. She powdered her branches with talc to make it easier for the scanner to pick up the points on them. Upon realizing that this powder left an intriguing trace of the branch on the surface where it lay, Moore

decided to place a plinth at the center of the exhibit, which featured a powdered trace of a branch used in the show. Its central placement led me to focus on it in the programming I developed for groups of daycare and day camp children:

And, right there in the middle, there was this velvet table...Because it was so central...it became the...center of the educational program that I developed. We were really focusing on that trace of an object...We used powdered sugar to sieve over leaves they had collected and left it on the ground, leaving a trace. (Natasha, transcription, pp. 22-23)

Cynthia Girard's *Tyran Tri Tri* exhibit placed a prison wall constructed of paper at the center of La Centrale's space, forcing visitors to squeeze under the rather small opening in the wall in order to see the rest of the exhibit. When developing educational programming for generalist student-teachers learning about art, focusing on this barrier was an obvious and appropriate choice:

It just made so much sense to focus on this idea of a barrier, as it was cutting the space right in half...It became such an important part, as it was the center of the exhibit. If it had just been put on a wall, it wouldn't have had the same impact. It is curatorial but also [an] artistic position because I think Cynthia really wanted it to be there...We did all sorts of installation work with paper after that—creating barriers and protection. It was just really connected to how everything was set up in the space. (Natasha, transcription, p. 23)

With both of these examples, as with all of my educational programming, I tried to find ways to pick up on the central ideas in the show that were also relevant to my visitors. The curatorial decisions naturally play up the central ideas of an exhibition, greatly influencing the direction I take educational programming in.

Museum Educator Roles and Education

Break down barriers

It is my belief that the main role that museum educators are playing or should play today is to make museums more accessible to wide varieties of audience members so that they can have meaningful experiences in these institutions:

I think the primary contemporary role is to break down barriers between the public and the art world or museums so that...diverse audiences can start to feel more comfortable in a museum space. Because it has been so long that the museum has been perceived as being for a specific population...because a lot of it is run by public funding. Just like a library, it is for everybody. (Natasha, transcription, p. 24)

I acknowledge that museums are becoming very aware of this and are making changes to support this role of museum educators:

...a lot of museums have noticed that this is a problem, and government agencies as well, so the funding is dependent on whether or not these new types of publics are being involved. It becomes the role of the museum educator to find the links between the art and the public or the curators and the public... We are the ones who...guide them through the gallery space and [try] to get them to become more active in these spaces. (Natasha, transcription, pp. 24-25)

Museum educators are the ones who are really helping other museum professionals “start to see how the museum could be for many other people” (Natasha, transcription, p. 25).

The example I gave to demonstrate my own work with breaking down barriers for diverse visitors was the work I did with the Immigrant Workers’ Centre and La Centrale:

I was working with a public that...very rarely, would think of going to a museum, [or] had never been to a museum before. This is a new country that they are living in. This was a great population to get in. To say, this space is for you!...they actually showed their artworks in the space [at La Centrale] and had their...graduation for the program...there. The photography they created was up in the space. I think it was a way for them to really feel comfortable. They had a potluck there. This all happened from me wanting to have an educational program that involved these new publics. (Natasha, transcription, p. 25).

This was a very successful example of how museum educators can make a gallery space a welcoming environment for all audience members, including uninitiated and nontraditional publics. This example embodies my conception of the contemporary role of museum educators: to make the museum more accessible for diverse publics.

Education updates

In my experiences with museum education, I have seen how important it is to have a strong base in educational theory: "...teaching does come quite naturally for me but it certainly made a huge difference by having the theory and to be able to put that into practice" (Natasha, transcription, p. 25). Educational updates through in-service development programs can help ensure that educators are aware of contemporary educational theory and practices that can be applied to their work:

I think one of the ways to do that is to have guest people who are specialized in their fields to share information in special events where you get to participate in workshops, hands-on workshops...with people who do work with, say evaluation programs on an ongoing basis, who really have seen it in the field and can help you find ways to implement that into your institution. (Natasha, transcription, p. 26)

Another method for ensuring that educators are aware of new ideas relating to education is offering them opportunities to attend and possibly present at conferences:

I mean, you learn so much from the CSEA [Canadian Society for Education through Art], the NAEA [National Art Education Association], CAGE [Canadian Art Gallery Educators]...You get a chance to see what worked and didn't work. Experts come in. (Natasha, transcription, p. 26)

Reflective practices in education are clearly an important part of my work as a museum educator. I personally feel that reflective practices based on narrative, drawing on work being done in teacher education, would be very beneficial to the pre-service and in-service education of museum educators:

...reflective practices are really, really important. Like, where you get a chance to think about what happened—what worked and what didn't work and how you can incorporate the good parts into the next visit and continuously looking at that. Not just the guided tour that you might have done today, but all those past experiences regarding why you are doing what you are doing, and where your motivations come from. (Natasha, transcription, p. 26)

Through being exposed to innovative, novel approaches to education, museum educators will have more tools to draw on when attempting to develop meaningful connections between their audiences and the museum.

Look at your past in order to grow

For me, the process of examining my personal experiences with art and museums and my professional practices has been a way to look at the origins of my beliefs and attitudes and to reflect on the practices that I engage in. It has been a way for me to look at my lived experiences in depth:

...you are looking at your personal experiences, the *real-life* experiences and looking at the current experiences—it is important. Instead of always talking about theory, you get a chance to link the theory and practice. (Natasha, transcription, p. 27)

It is my belief that, by bringing these lived experiences to the surface and examining them, we can promote reflection and, ultimately, growth:

I think growth can only happen when you understand your past. You need a base to stem from...Your past is important and you need to look at it. You need to look at your past in order to grow, and I think that is exactly what life history research does. We look at our pasts to understand and to become better. (Natasha, transcription, p. 27)

This process has helped me to better understand how my past experiences have led me to where I am today and how they have influenced my beliefs and practices as a museum educator:

...this whole experience will have *really* been beneficial for understanding my philosophy for museum education, understanding where these values are coming

from. I think this will guide me and help me in programming because I will feel that much more connected to what I am focusing on. (Natasha, transcription, p. 28)

For me, this process connected me to why I am engaged in certain practices and behaviors, which I feel is particularly important for educators, as “we are dealing with the public, we are dealing with people” (Natasha, transcription, p. 26). As such, we need to critically examine our practices in order to create optimal experiences for our publics.

Chapter Nine

Climax: Cross-Case Analysis

The previous five chapters outlined the life stories of each participant. These stories were organized around themes that I discovered in analyzing each participant's journey to their museum education position. The in-depth analysis of each participant's life experiences revealed significant insight into their personal and professional lives. In this chapter, I present a thorough analysis of the links and divergences I discovered between the participants' stories.

It is clear that widespread conclusions about the profession cannot be made based on the experiences of five people. However, by examining the connections and patterns between participants' stories and situating these realities within the wider context of museum education, this chapter adds to our understanding of the field, emphasizing depth over breadth. As Goodson (1981) has noted, "The life historian must constantly broaden the concern with personal truth to take account of broader socio-historical concerns" (p. 67). Xu and Connelly (2010) believe that "every experience is encountered in the context of a web of historical meaning and significance" (p. 352). By uncovering this contextual web, life historians enable individual stories to take on more powerful roles, influencing our understanding of a domain. Goodson's reference to Becker's (1970) metaphor of a mosaic is helpful in elucidating how individual histories can contribute to our understanding of a field: "each piece added to a mosaic adds a little to our understanding" (as quoted in Goodson, 1981, p. 67).

In this chapter, I build on the individual stories through "intertextual and intercontextual mode[s] of analysis" (Goodson, 2000, p. 24) to ensure that these

participants' stories contribute to our understanding of the field of museum education. As Goodson noted, through this, the life stories of educators "build up with a broader social history of teaching but one which is sensitive to their individual lives and experiences" (p. 24). By developing links between these five life histories and placing them within the context of museum educational discourse, these mosaic pieces are added to the larger portrait of our field.

Personal Experiences with Museums and Art

In this cross-case analysis, museum educators' meaningful experiences as museum visitors and as creators of art will be examined. The participants in this study revealed that their early and recent museum and art-related experiences left lasting impressions on them. This is similar to the results of Michael Spock's (Jensen Leichter & Spock, 1999; Spock, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Spock et al., 2000) study of museum professionals' memories of learning experiences in museum settings. When reviewing these stories, Spock (2000b) and his colleagues were "struck by how profoundly meaningful they were" (p. 2). The stories that these professionals shared with Spock and his colleagues demonstrated that "these pivotal events can lay down deeply felt, long-held traces" (2000a, p. 29).

Unlike the in-service generalist art teachers in Linda Szabad-Smyth's (2002) research, the participants in this dissertation have been exposed to a series of encouraging, positive experiences in a wide variety of art-related situations. They now have a passion for art and art museums. Whereas the generalist teachers in Szabad-Smyth's study expressed anxiety related to most of their personal experiences with what they would consider art-making, the museum educators in this study expressed a sense of

encouragement and even passion related to their experiences as museum visitors and creators of art. They shared early art-related memories that were confidence-building, with freedom being a major factor. Their recent positive museum experiences were connected to holistic encounters and pleasant surprises. On the other hand, the negative experiences they had recently were restrictive and left them feeling unfulfilled. The number of recent negative museum experiences that these participants encountered is very low, as they have become adept at avoiding such experiences. These educators have many lasting, encouraging memories related to personal art and museum experiences, which have led to their confidence in art creation and museum-going.

Early Museum Experiences

Aesthetic Experiences

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with esthetic intensity. (Dewey, 1934, p. 195)

The majority of the museum educators in this study did not regularly visit museums as children, with the exception of Daniel and me. However, all of the participants, except Camille, recall extraordinary early art museum visits that were emotional and meaningful and involved an enhanced state of perception. These memories thus contain some of the components we traditionally associate with aesthetic experiences. Kathleen Walsh-Piper (1994) has referred to aesthetic experiences as “a combination of interest and pleasure and curiosity” that includes a “heightened attention to perception, which is both meaningful and memorable” (p. 105). For the participants in

this study, artworks or artifacts witnessed during museum visits often stood out as remarkable, as did the architecture of the buildings and the journey to these destinations.

Emma recalls only one experience at a museum as a young child. She described this experience as being particularly powerful. She was in awe of the architecture of the building and the artifacts located inside. Emma also had a profound and emotional early experience with an artwork in a museum. The relationship that she developed with the artwork while standing in front of it was so profound that she was brought to tears and the museum seemed to disappear around her and the artwork.

Museum visits were more common in Robert's childhood than Emma's. As a child, Robert felt that every part of the museum experience was special and engrossing—the trip to the museum, the cloakroom, the atmosphere, and the artworks. He felt that the museum offered him a learning environment that set it apart from school settings, enabling the museum to go beyond the day-to-day realities of a young student. The museum offered Robert an exciting, nontraditional learning experience that allowed his curiosity to soar.

As a young child, Daniel frequently visited art museums with his grandparents. He recalled being overwhelmed by the works he saw in art museums. He felt that the artworks he witnessed contained a great deal of beauty. Additionally, as a child, Daniel was impressed by the fact that there were individuals who took the time to create these works, even thousands of years ago.

Like Daniel, I regularly visited museums with family members, and occasionally with my school. I too was blown away by the artworks that I saw—the most vivid early memory of this being at the National Gallery of Canada. The trips to museums were also

particularly important to me, as I felt we were traveling to a special destination.

Furthermore, the engaging pedagogical techniques used by educators in museums seemed remarkable and validating to me.

These experiences have stayed within these individuals' memories for significant lengths of time, indicating that they left a lasting impression on them. What made these experiences stay in their memories is the fact that they were not ordinary events, as each of these participants referred to their museum visits as being outside of the quotidian. This is consistent with Spock's (2000a) findings in his study of museum professionals' early museum experiences: "These stories were about events deeply felt and long remembered. They were not life-as-usual, but about events that made a difference, that added up to something" (p. 27).

Particularly for Emma, Daniel, Robert, and me, these extraordinary events were emotional and meaningful and involved an enhanced state of perception. *Aesthetic experience* is highly contested concept, with a multitude of definitions. What is generally consistent with the definitions of aesthetic experience is the fact that it is an emotional, deeply felt experience that is associated with a "heightened state of consciousness" (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 9) and "feelings of personal wholeness, a sense of discovery, and a sense of human connectedness" (p. 178). As Richard Shusterman (1997) has put it, aesthetic experiences are "satisfyingly heightened, absorbing, meaningful, and affective" (p. 38). Unlike earlier notions of aesthetic disinterest and distancing from art, I subscribe to definitions of aesthetic experience that emphasize the dynamic presence and engagement of the participant in the experience (Constantino,

2010; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Henry, 2010). Emma, Daniel, Robert, and I shared memories that embodied these notions of aesthetic experiences.

Despite the hot debate about the value of aesthetic experience in art education today (Tavin, 2007), a number of scholars feel that aesthetic experience is highly relevant and necessary for meaningful learning in the arts to occur, with which I concur (Barrett, 2010; Constantino, 2010; Henry, 2010). This may be especially true for museum publics: as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson (1990) discovered, this is a goal for many museum visitors. Carole Henry (2010) shed light on this point:

The aesthetic experience is a complex, emotional response that can focus perception, engage viewers, and lead to greater insight and understanding. Museum visitors want these kinds of meaningful encounters with art. (p. 43)

Although we may not have had this goal in our minds as young museum visitors, Emma, Robert, Daniel, and I were fortunate to have engaged with such experiences at an early age.

Autonomy

...alonetime is a hidden but vital need that—even without great programmatic changes—museums are well positioned to fulfill. If we make ourselves aware of this need, we can regain our sure footing and confidence about solitude for children being as healthy as relating to other people. (Schaler Buchholz, 2000, p. 6)

All of the participants in this study referred to a sense of freedom associated with their positive early museum experiences. These experiences left room for them to explore work on their own, to learn on their own, and/or to freely express their own opinions.

Daniel referred to the space his grandparents gave him to explore work on his own during his early gallery visits. He emphasized that his grandparents did not direct his

experiences. Rather, he was encouraged to wander on his own and he was asked to share his perceptions with his grandparents:

I remember nine times out of ten going on my own. I mean, I was with her at the exhibition, but we might not be in the same room, and I was kind of discovering things on my own...(Daniel, transcription, p. 32)

Likewise, Robert referred to his appreciation for the free time his teachers allowed him to have in museum field trips: “You always had free time at some point. We could look at stuff” (Robert, transcription, p. 2). Robert associated this free time with leisure learning, which he felt was an alternative to learning in the classroom setting.

Emma’s profound encounter with a Van Gogh painting was a solitary experience. She had the freedom to engage in a deep, emotional dialogue with this work on her own. This dialogue became so deep that the Emma felt as though only she and the painting existed at that moment.

Camille referred the freedom associated with discovery learning. She was impressed with this opportunity to learn and discover on her own: “that element of discovery because you are searching for these fossils on your own” (Emma, transcription, p. 1).

Finally, I shared a profound early museum experience, which was focused on the museum educator offering me the freedom to share my own reactions to the encountered artworks: “Usually somebody tells you what to think and he wanted to know what we thought” (Natasha, transcription, p. 1). Furthermore, the educator requested that students spend time engaging with the work by themselves, which I greatly appreciated.

In all of these early museum experiences, the participants had freedom to explore and contemplate on their own. Ester Schaler Buchholz has asserted that museums are

“places for alonetime” (2000, p. 3). She noted that “a sense of autonomy is a big part of a child’s pleasure in a museum” (p. 3). Schaler Buchholz believes that alonetime is a human need that can stimulate our “deepest desires for knowledge” (p. 6). She has eloquently elaborated on this claim:

Solitary experiences allow us to focus with single vision on one area and study it carefully or intensively or leisurely, soul-search or just be there in a special place and breathe in the atmosphere. (p. 7)

Similarly, Spock’s study revealed comparable results. He stated that “Among the stories collected, quite a few offered narratives that illustrate Buchholz’s concept of alonetime” (2000b, p. 15).

Offering such opportunities to self-direct their own visit and express their personal opinions gave the participants opportunities to be autonomous. Arnold (1996) has elucidated the importance of autonomy in the arts and in the general development of children:

The arts give students access to how they are unique and allow them to take a greater role in their own learning. The arts provide a forum in schools that allows youngsters to express their ideas and give voice to their changing value systems. (p. 23)

All of the participants in this study noted that their memorable early museum experiences were marked by opportunities to engage in alonetime and autonomous exploration. This ultimately enabled them to play a prominent role in their own learning in these museum visits.

Early Out-of-Museum Art Experiences

Artistic Experimentation

In the case of artistic inquiry, learning entails active construction of knowledge through hands-on exploration and experimentation, which are interwoven with and shaped by creative thinking. (Marshall, 2010, p. 16)

Even though I did not include any planned interview questions that dealt with the participants' early experiences with art-making, all of the participants offered insight into their early experiences with art. Camille, Emma, Robert, and I referred to early memories of experimenting with artistic practices. These memories are filled with discovery and play rather than predetermined outcomes. Furthermore, these experiences were focused on our personal interests and free from anxiety.

Camille mentioned that art was her favorite play activity while growing up. These playful explorations could certainly be associated with freedom. Her parents supplied her with art supplies throughout her childhood, which they expected her to experiment with freely.

The visual arts were a strong part of Emma's elementary school curriculum. She referred to her appreciation of the unstructured projects that her teachers gave her and her peers in the arts: "I liked the space—the freedom" (Emma, transcription, p. 6).

Robert referred to drawing as being "like a game" (Robert, transcription, p. 3). Drawing was a playful, imaginative activity that he enjoyed voluntarily engaging in. Robert noted that, in these informal art sessions, it was the "whole imagination side of it [that] was interesting to [him]" (Robert, transcription, p. 3).

I too recall experimenting with art materials in my early childhood. I often worked with my mother as she created art. I was drawn to the materials that my mother worked with and their potential, which she encouraged me to experiment with.

Olivia Gude (2009) reminds us of the importance of offering children and adolescents opportunities for free artistic experimentation unencumbered by anxiety. She

believes that, if children are given the freedom to explore artistically without fear, they will increase their awareness and engagement:

A child gains a sense of himself or herself by freely playing with materials, images, and ideas...The child develops the capacity for nuanced attention to the world and his/her interactions with the material world. This attentiveness is not based in fear or weariness of the world, but in wonder and awareness of the potential to act and interact with the world. (p. 7)

Ultimately, Gude contended that, through free and safe play with art notions, images, and media, children and adolescents will inevitably achieve a “strong sense of agency, a belief that he or she can shape the world” (p. 7) and a capacity for autonomy—both of which are necessary for full participation in democratic life. Thus, Gude views free play with art as an essential practice for children and adolescents.

George Szekely (1983) believes that free play is a necessary component of all artistic creativity: “The element of playfulness that characterizes all creative investigation helps the artist generate new ideas and sustain the freedom necessary to plan and execute works of art” (p. 18). It is his contention that children need time to experiment on their own so their art ideas can develop fully. He also noted that free play is a natural part of children’s realities and should certainly be drawn upon in art-making sessions in order to align activities with students’ interests and to promote creativity. Like Gude, Szekely believes that free experimentation reduces fear and promotes out-of-the-box thinking: “Their self-esteem enhances, they will truly let go and risk trying something new” (p. 18).

Gude and Szekely clearly endorse playful experimentation as a necessary component of art-making. My participants acknowledge that freedom, self-initiated investigations, and play with art materials are artistic acts and are of value. They see early

playful experimentation with art as a creative and memorable act. This introduction to the world of artistic experimentation was enhanced and deepened in their future art courses, in studio work outside of the school system, and in museum experiences.

Encouragement and Recognition in the Arts

We develop tacit theories of teaching, drawing, assessment, development, artistic endeavor, learning, interpretation, and childhood based on our previous encounters, both positive and negative. (Kalin, 2005, p. 19)

Camille, Daniel, Robert, and I referred to receiving outside encouragement for our artistic practices during our formative years. This encouragement often came from parents, teachers, and peers. This positive reinforcement was certainly a factor in our decisions to pursue advanced studies in the field. Emma did not refer to such encouragement or recognition of talent from peers, parents, or teachers, but, as noted above, she did have positive experiences in the art classroom in elementary school.

Camille's parents encouraged her to work with art at home. They provided her with the materials and her father often drew alongside her. She won art contests and awards in her early childhood and "art-making was encouraged by [her] teachers" (Camille, professional and related personal history, p. 1). Her work was often displayed in the school board's building as well. Furthermore, Camille was admitted to the renowned Etobicoke School of Arts. In this school, she continued to have opportunities to exhibit her work and enhance her skills.

Many of the adults in Daniel's childhood valued art. His grandmother encouraged him to interact with art regularly by accompanying him on gallery and museum visits. Daniel's high school art teacher strongly encouraged him to pursue the arts. He mentioned that he did not have a particular natural talent for art during his high school

years, which could easily have led him to stop participating in elective art courses. By setting high standards for Daniel, this teacher encouraged him to continue to explore the arts and to hone his skills in the field.

During his childhood, Robert noted his sister's talent in drawing. He enjoyed drawing and wished that he could be as good at it as his sister one day. By the time he reached junior high school, he very actively worked at perfecting his skills so that he could achieve this. He noted that, at one point, he realized that he felt he had defeated her. This competitive game was encouraging to Robert. When he reached high school, he recognized his particular talent for the visual arts. At this point, Robert knew his talent in the arts set him apart from other students—it was his “special thing” (Robert, transcription, p. 3). Others would compliment him on his abilities, and this encouraged him.

My parents encouraged me in my involvement with the visual arts throughout my childhood and adolescence. Art was an essential component of my upbringing—as both my parents were involved in artistic practices. I was praised for my art in elementary school and, particularly, high school. This praise and encouragement came from peers, teachers, friends' parents, and my own parents.

In Szabad-Smyth's (2002) study of generalist art teachers' experiences with art, her participants revealed that they lacked confidence in art, as they aimed to create work that was as good as their peers. They did not feel that they could readily achieve this. They had lost their confidence in the visual arts as they entered school. “They began to recognize that there were others with ‘talent’ and eventually gave up on art” (p. 184). Szabad-Smyth noted:

At a time when children become more self-conscious of what others think and begin to compare themselves with peers, it can be devastating to expose artwork that one doesn't feel good about. (p. 184)

This becomes particularly important during the early adolescent years.

Concerning the “emerging expertise” stage of aesthetic development, which refers to nine- to eleven-year-olds, Marianne S. Kerlavage (1998) stated:

This stage is a critical one in artistic development. It is vital that as teachers we understand the huge challenges facing these students and realize our role in aiding their development. The learners' changing definitions of what art making is about and their frustration with a lack of expertise move many of them away from an interest in the visual arts. (p. 34).

Luckily for my participants, teachers, parents, and/or peers recognized and encouraged their interest and potential in the visual arts, particularly during middle and high school, which can be an especially vulnerable time for students, especially in the arts. They were encouraged and thus able to thrive in the arts.

Recent Positive Museum Experiences

Unexpected

Museums are particularly effective in providing novel, interactive settings where children and adults can encounter striking, unusual and surprising objects and settings, thus capitalizing on the learning potential of “cognitive dissonance”. (Hein, 1998, p. 152)

All of the participants referred to being pleasantly surprised by the content of their recent positive museum experiences. These experiences offered them something that went beyond their expectations, presenting them with novel information and experiences.

Camille was not familiar with Zaha Hadid's work before she went to her 2006 exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. She was surprised by the high caliber of Hadid's work and described the experience as an “incredible, pleasant surprise” (Camille, transcription, p. 6). Hadid's work went beyond Camille's expectations for

contemporary architecture: “I just thought her work was just so absolutely phenomenal...And I think I may enjoy her architecture much more than other contemporary architects” (Camille, transcription, p. 6).

In describing a recent positive experience at the Art Institute of Chicago, Daniel referred to being surprised by the new section of the museum. He had already been impressed by the famous collection in the older section of the museum. But, when he entered the new section, he was shocked to see a special exhibition of Cy Twombly’s work, which he was already very interested in. Once he was in the Twombly exhibit, Daniel was expecting to see only the works he was already familiar with. He did see many of these, and he was satisfied. However, he was confronted by a series of new works by Twombly in the next room—and he was pleasantly surprised. The fact that the experience went beyond his expectations was an important factor in this being a profound event for Daniel:

...maybe having ran through the permanent collection first, and kind of knowing what to expect and then being blown away by it, this whole Cy Twombly thing at the end was just an afterthought. I wasn’t expecting to really look at any more art that day. And then, the most powerful thing happened. (Daniel, transcription, p. 10)

In describing his experience at the Redpath Museum in 2000, Robert indicated that he was surprised by the museum’s approach to displaying artifacts: “I remember being kind of really pleasantly surprised...I remember really liking it because it was so different from what you see now in museums” (Robert, transcription, p. 5).

Emma was surprised by the DIA Foundation’s space and the way that the curators created a dialogue between the space and Tacita Dean’s artwork. This aspect of the experience was certainly surprising to her. When offered an opportunity to see the same

work in another location, Emma decided not to do so since her expectations had been set so high at the DIA and the surprise factor would probably not be there.

In describing my first visit to the Centre Georges Pompidou in 2008, I referred to being surprised by the architecture, as it was not what I was expecting: “I was flabbergasted. Just getting out of the metro. It was so different from everything else in Paris” (Natasha, transcription, p. 7). I was also surprised by the presence of a gallery made for children within this contemporary art space, as well as the quality of this gallery.

John Howard Falk and Lynn Diane Dierking (1992) referred to the importance of understanding visitors’ expectations, and they noted that one of those expectations is that they want to see something new and unusual. They noted, “Visitors to museums want to have the fun of seeing strange and unusual things, of being visually stimulated and intellectually challenged” (p. 142). Falk and Dierking later stated, “A considerable amount of the learning that occurs in free-choice conditions is a result of novelty-seeking behavior” (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 115). Likewise, George E. Hein (1998) emphasized the importance of surprise in museum learning:

The unique qualities of museums that can lead to disorientation and inattention can also be exploited to support novel, surprising, and disconfirming experiences, now recognized as crucial for conceptual understanding. (p. 152)

The positive experiences shared by the participants in this study confirmed that point. They referred to being surprised by an aspect of their visit, which helped them to have a positive experience. Some facet of each of these positive experiences went beyond the visitors’ expectations by presenting them with something surprising and unusual, stimulating them both visually and intellectually.

Architecture

When people are asked to recall their museum experiences, whether a day or two later or after twenty or thirty years, the most frequently recalled and persistent aspects relate to the physical context...(Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 53)

Each of the participants referred to the museum's architecture as playing a strong role in their recent positive museum experiences. Positive associations with the general architecture of the museum, the setup of the space, and the care taken in finding links between the artwork on display or the museum's vision statement and its structure were reported.

Camille referred to enjoying being in the physical spaces of "museums of incredible reputation" (Camille, transcription, p. 6). When describing her positive experience at the Guggenheim Museum, she noted that she enjoyed its unique architecture:

...the structure within which it was being exhibited—the architecture there is pretty interesting and pretty directive in the way that it controls flow. It is a very particular experience. (Camille, transcription, p. 6)

Daniel was also positively affected by the architecture of the Art Institute of Chicago. He referred to the new section as being a "very elegant, kind of minimalist glass and steel wing of the building" (Daniel, transcription, p. 8), designed for the contemporary art collection that it typically holds. He referred to admiring this new wing as he meandered through it.

In the case of his recent experience at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Robert was positively affected by the renovations that had recently been done on the original building. He was also very intrigued by the way that the museum was able to fit into its contrasting surroundings: "It is this fancy, expensive museum right in the middle of

Chinatown. I like that” (Robert, transcription, p. 7). He enjoyed the fact that the museum was able to fit into this busy neighborhood, with its “really charming kinds of buildings” (Robert, transcription, p. 7). He felt that the building, being located in this busy part of the city, within the hustle and bustle of everyday life, speaks to the museum’s vision statement: “Art Matters”.

Emma’s recollection of a recent positive museum experience was directly related to the museum’s architecture and how this interacted with the work on display. She was impressed by the space within which the DIA Foundation is set, describing it as beautiful, spacious, and naturally lit. The work on display required silence and space, which is exactly how it was presented. She was enthralled by the way that the DIA Foundation was able to create “a synergy between the space and the artist’s work” (Emma, transcription, p. 8).

With the case of my recent positive museum visit to the Centre Pompidou, I was drawn to the playful architecture of the building: “It is almost a playground when you walk in—the neon lights and so on. There was something about this playful space that I was attracted to” (Natasha, transcription, p. 8). To me, this playful architecture spoke to the creative and ludic nature of this museum.

Falk and Dierking (1992) have emphasized the importance of a museum’s architecture to museum visits. According to Falk and Dierking, the physical environment of a museum greatly affects how and what one learns and remembers in relation to a visit:

All learning occurs within a physical context, and this contextual stamp ultimately becomes important in determining what information is perceived, how it is stored, and when and how it is recalled. Where one is has a tremendous impact on how, what and how much one learns. (p. 112)

These researchers remind us that “[w]ithin the built environment, the physical context includes the architecture and the *feel* of the building as well as the objects contained in it” (2000, p. 57). They noted that the appeal of a museum’s architecture plays a strong role in visitors’ decisions to attend a museum, and how they behave, what they observe, and what they recall from these experiences. The educators in this study revealed that the appeal of a museum’s architecture contributed significantly to what they consider to be their recent positive museum experiences.

Recent Negative Museum Experiences

Exhibition environment

In theory, the museum staff creates the setting in which it is most likely the visitor can have a meaningful experience with the work of art, an environment free of distraction in which the work of art is the central focus. (Henry, 2010, pp. 17-18)

When recalling recent negative museum experiences, the participants referred to elements of exhibition environments that were less than ideal. References to poor color choices, faulty placement of artworks, access issues, and disrupted flow of traffic were plentiful. Most of the participants indicated that they were usually able to avoid museum experiences with these kinds of flaws.

Camille referred to feeling crowded in a recent museum experience. She described the experience as being centered on a “blockbuster” exhibit, which aimed to bring mass numbers of visitors into the exhibition space. There were so many people that Camille had trouble seeing the works, of which there were fewer than she had expected. She felt that this was a physically uncomfortable museum experience. The discomfort is what she remembers the most from the event. She attributes this discomfort to being

forced to experience the museum in a prescribed way—“where you are shepherded through the experience” (Camille, transcription, p. 8).

During a recent museum visit, Daniel was disappointed with the design of the exhibition. He felt that the color choices made it difficult to read the material on the wall. According to Daniel, the way that the exhibition was arranged seemed to indicate that the designers saw the works of art as secondary, which he believes should never happen. He described the works as being “few and small and fragmentary” (Daniel, transcription, p. 14), yet the amount of writing was overwhelming. Like Camille, Daniel also recalled physical discomfort. He referred to the air quality tiring him out and his back and neck becoming sore. He believes this was due to the way the museum directed his movements. Like Camille, Daniel believes that in his negative experiences, the museum imposes a particular experience on him, leading to discomfort.

When visiting a children’s museum with a group of young students, Robert had what he considers to be a negative museum experience. He felt this happened because the space was cramped, there were too many people in the exhibition area at a time, the noise levels were too high, and, as mentioned by Camille and Daniel, the trajectory was decided by the museum.

In Emma’s recent negative museum experience, the artworks were placed in a lackadaisical fashion. She referred to the works “contaminating” each other, preventing her from effectively engaging with the work.

Similarly, my recent negative museum experience was due to the museum disrupting my engagement with artworks. I was unable to see a work that I had traveled there to engage with and the noise of construction disturbed my concentration.

Furthermore, a guard reprimanded me for an unnecessarily long time because I had taken a photograph. He also asked me to leave the gallery to check my shoulder bag.

In all of these experiences, the exhibition environment played a strong role. When Carole Henry (2000) studied the positive and negative museum experiences of art students, she found that the exhibition environment was one of two primary factors affecting their experiences. Henry defined the exhibition environment as

...the way the exhibition is arranged as a whole, the way the works are spaced in relation to one another, the lighting and noise level in the gallery, the direction viewers are to proceed through the exhibition, and the way the museum staff interacts with the visitor. (p. 102)

Lorraine E. Maxwell and Gary W. Evans (2002) pointed out that if proper attention is not paid to these factors, it can potentially lead to cognitive and physical fatigue, distraction, and even anxiety. The participants in this study referred to all of these aspects of the exhibition environment in their recollections of negative museum experiences and touched on some of the undesirable outcomes that Maxwell and Evans have outlined.

Summary of Personal Experiences

The participants in this study were exposed to early positive experiences with museums and art-making. Most of the participants recall profound early visits to museums—ones that could be considered aesthetic experiences. All of the participants were afforded early opportunities to engage with art in museums in autonomous ways, in which they could exercise personal exploration. Their early art experiences involved play and free experimentation, which they clearly identify as being valuable artistic endeavors. Most of the participants were given significant outside encouragement for their artistic productions. These positive early art experiences inside and outside of museums provided an ideal platform for continued curiosity and learning in relation to art museums and the

visual arts in general. This is consistent with Spock's (2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Spock et al., 2000) study, in that the narratives of museum professionals' early museum experiences were largely positive. I agree with Spock's assertion that the "narrators may have chosen museum careers because these early experiences revealed an exciting and comfortable path for pursuing their developing interests or passions," (2000a, p. 29) even though this may be a subconscious reality. In the case of this particular dissertation project, the positive, encouraging experiences with art that these participants encountered outside of the museum may also have been influential. It is safe to say that, if these educators had encountered numerous discouraging experiences in museums and with art outside of the museum, it is unlikely that they would have been as passionate about art nor would they have chosen a career in art museum education.

The positive aspects of early encounters with art that these educators experienced are:

- A heightened state of consciousness when experiencing art in a museum setting.
- A sense of autonomy when viewing artwork in museums.
- Opportunities for free play and experimentation with art concepts and materials.
- Encouragement and recognition of their interests and abilities in visual arts.

The recent positive museum experiences that the participants shared revealed their current passion for and facility with art and art museums. The participants referred to the architectural environment as being an important component of museum visits. Positive museum experiences were associated with the architecture of the museum reflecting the vision of the museum, taking the visitors on a journey, or being in synergy with the artworks on display. Furthermore, pleasant surprises were described as important to these

positive visits. The negative experiences were clearly associated with the exhibition environment restricting or interrupting visitors' experiences.

These narratives indicated that the participants are comfortable navigating museum environments. Because of this facility within museum settings, they are open to and even attracted to factors that novice museum visitors may find intimidating. Carole Henry (2010) noted:

The architecture can be imposing and even intimidating to a first-time visitor. Much like the cathedral, older museums were designed to inspire a sense of awe. Today's more contemporary buildings, although far less formal, can also be imposing. (p. 17)

Similarly, Falk and Dierking (2000) observed: "walking into a museum where you have never been before, especially if you have not been to many museums previously, can be tremendously stressful" (p. 114). The museum educators in this study reported feeling a connection to the architecture encountered in their positive museum experiences. They are comfortable being in such spaces. Even if this was their first time in the museums they referred to, the architecture did not intimidate them. Rather, they reveled in the architectural choices associated with these museums.

The surprise of the unexpected was a significant positive factor for these participants during recent museum experiences. This quest for novelty in museum experiences is universal. However, in Falk's research during the 1970s, he and his colleagues determined that: "When settings were extremely novel, learning was depressed. Learning was also depressed in extremely familiar (i.e. boring) settings" (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 115). This research emphasized that a happy medium is required for optimal experiences. The participants in this dissertation enter museum experiences with a strong background in museum visiting and art knowledge. The aspects of these

participants' museum experiences that were surprising—new work from an artist, work that is distinct from an artist's contemporaries, and atypical approaches to display and education—are not what one would typically associate with the novelty experienced by a novice museum visitor.

Finally, the components of exhibition display that these participants referred to as being important to the quality of their visit are common for advanced museum visitors:

They [advanced viewers] expect the art to be on view in such a way that they are not distracted by glare or other art or even other people... Time is important as more advanced viewers are aware of how to look in depth at a work of art and need enough time to become engaged with the work and make discoveries on their own. (Henry, 2010, p. 29)

In a study conducted by Susan Longhenry (2007), novice or infrequent visitors recounted feelings of inadequacy and frustration regarding how to navigate through exhibitions (Longhenry, 2007). The participants in this study were not frustrated with this reality. Rather, they discussed notions that Henry refers to as being important for advanced visitors. These aspects are related to conditions allowing in-depth interactions with art. The participants in this dissertation clearly indicated that their museum experiences were negative when the museum did not provide them with opportunities to engage with the artwork on display in in-depth and meaningful ways.

The aspects of recent experiences in museums that were important for positive visits for the participants in this study indicate that they are advanced museum visitors.

These aspects are:

- Appealing architecture that they can connect with.

- Unexpected surprises related to the contents of an exhibit, the work of an artist in comparison with that of his/her contemporaries, or the display or educational components of an exhibition.
- Elements conducive to in-depth, meaningful experiences with artworks or objects on display.

The participants in this dissertation were exposed to positive, encouraging experiences with art at home, in school settings, and in museums. They showed an early interest in the arts, which then transformed into a lifelong passion. These individuals are clearly adept at engaging with art and museums and at ease in museum settings. Their recent memorable museum experiences have been affected by components typically important to advanced visitors. Thus, these museum educators were involved in the arts and museums in positive ways as children, which encouraged them to become engaged in the arts and to remain avid museum visitors.

Professional Experiences with Museum Education

The early positive and encouraging experiences encountered by these educators contributed to their becoming engaged in art as adults. This helped set them on a professional path that is highly focused on both art and education. Although the road that led them to careers in museum education seems to have been stumbled upon haphazardly, the road was clearly meant for them, and the discovery was serendipitous.

In this section of the cross-case analysis, museum educators' experiences as professionals will be studied. The path that led these educators to their careers as well as the particular issues being experienced in these positions will be examined. Art and education were the main highlights of their preparation for their museum education

positions. A primary common goal for these educators is to provide encouraging, interactive experiences for their visitors. Their interactions with education colleagues are equally encouraging and positive. The majority of the educators spoke of the importance of education and learning in the art museum, and the need for this to be valued more by institutions and society. It is clear that these educators have long understood how powerfully meaningful interactions with art can be. They are dedicated to learning about art and have explored how they can inspire others to do the same by involving themselves in degrees in education and the arts and, eventually, careers in art museum education.

Museum Educator Preparation

Art + Education

...besides art history, majors such as museum education, arts education, and education are receiving greater attention from art museums. The emphasis on candidates with a proper education background suggests that art museum education is increasingly becoming a profession of its own. (Chen Cooper, 2007, p. 72)

All of the museum educators in this research pursued both art degrees and education degrees or combined art education degrees. Thus, they worked directly with fine arts and pedagogy in their postsecondary education. None of the participants undertook a degree specifically in museum studies or museum education.

After being inspired by his high school art teacher, Daniel pursued his growing interest in the fine arts by working on a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Western Ontario. After working in a gallery in Toronto as an attendant, he realized that he did not want to continue with this type of job. He began to consider working in education. When he moved to Montreal, Daniel obtained a certificate in education at McGill University.

Once Camille had completed her secondary school education at the renowned Etobicoke School of the Arts, she decided to continue her work in the fine arts. She first attended the Ontario College of Art and Design and then the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, where she completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She then earned a Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia. After working in both formal education and museum education settings, Camille decided to register for a Master's degree in Art Education at Concordia University.

Robert was clearly enthralled with the arts in high school. He continued to explore this passion in postsecondary education when he got his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Ottawa. After that, he worked in a non-art-museum setting for a short time, and then began a Bachelor of Education degree at Queen's University. Upon returning to the museum where he had worked prior to going to Queen's University, Robert decided to begin a Master's degree in Art Education in order to make a greater connection between his love of art and education.

Emma completed a Bachelor's degree in art education at Concordia University. At the same time, she worked as a preschool art workshop educator. After working with young adults on an art project in Brazil, she decided to pursue a Master's degree in Art Education at Concordia University.

After an exceptional experience in a visual culture course at the University of Toronto, I decided to start a degree in Fine Art History at the same university. I worked in community and museum settings as an arts educator and then decided that I wanted to explore this field further in a graduate program. I began a Master's degree in Art

Education at Concordia University. Following this, I commenced my doctoral studies in the same department.

This combination of education in the visual arts and pedagogy would seem to be ideal for art museum education positions. The specific vocabulary and approaches involved in the fine arts are certainly essential to museum education positions. Furthermore, a good understanding of and facility with current pedagogical approaches is vital. The particular profile of the museum educators in this study is not consistent with David Ebitz's (2005) study on the education museum educators. Ebitz found that "Preparation in art history and expertise in the collections came first. Learning how to apply this knowledge in teaching and the preparation of educational materials came second" (p. 158). Ebitz refers to Zeller's (1985) work, which found the same thing:

...many art museum educators have more in common with their curatorial colleagues and their art historian counterparts in colleges and universities than they do with classroom teachers or art educators. (p. 58)

Furthermore, Ebitz discussed the results of El Omami's (1989) study, which asked museum directors what they felt the education and experiences of museum educators should be. These directors emphasized their belief that a strong background in art history is the primary requirement for the position. Ebitz reviewed the American Association of Museum's monthly newsletter from January 2002 to December 2003 and found that art history was the "most consistent academic qualification" sought (2005, p. 160). This survey seems to suggest that museums require museum educators to have a background similar to, but far less advanced than, a curator. This is disconcerting, as museum educators clearly have very different tasks and roles from curators. Talboys (2005) noted that "...the museum educator needs to have a good background knowledge and

understanding of educational psychology, philosophy, and sociology, as well as more general educational theory and practice” (p. 31). Likewise, Vicky Woollard (2004) pointed out that museum educators “need expertise in pedagogical theory and practice, and should be able to relate these to the various learning patterns, styles and needs of the public” (p. 136). This is not typically expected of curators.

However, times are changing, as Virginia Stephen (1997) outlined:

While previously most [museum educators] came from either an academic/curatorial background or from the ranks of volunteers, most now are expected to have formal training and experience as educators as well as in art history and/or studio. (p. 239)

In her doctoral dissertation research, Chen Cooper (née Chen) observed that other majors are being recognized as important to the museum profession, such as art education, education, and museum education (Chen, 2004). She believes this indicates that art museum education is becoming a distinct profession, with requirements separate from those of the curatorial world (Chen Copper, 2007). She feels that museums are becoming more aware of the particular skills required for museum education today:

Art museums are gradually acknowledging that knowledge of art and of effective instructional methods for non-classroom settings are necessary for raising audience awareness and appreciation of art. (p. 72)

The educational background of the participants in my own doctoral dissertation coincides with Chen Cooper’s findings. These museum educators have significant educational experience in education and fine arts, which gave them the skills increasingly being found to be of primary importance in these positions. This suggests that a change is occurring in the museum educators’ education and experience requirements. This change is responding to the realization that educators have specialized roles in the museum that are distinct from those of curators.

Stumbling Upon It

...there are no clear models for the logical development of a career in art museum education. (Pond, 1988, p. 11)

All of the participants in this study referred to stumbling upon the world of museum education as a career choice. While growing up, they did not envision themselves working in a museum. A series of fortuitous events led them to their careers. The stories all indicate that these museum educators feel lucky that they happened upon the world of museum education.

Daniel feels that he stumbled into museum education as a career choice. After feeling frustrated with a high school internship during his education degree, he searched for an alternative venue where he could teach art. He sent a letter to a local museum with the intention of volunteering. However, the museum was in the midst of an expansion and he quickly ended up with a paid position rather than a volunteer position.

Camille was first introduced to the field of museum education during her engagement with a teacher preparation course held at the Vancouver Art Gallery. She became interested in the work that these educators were doing in an art museum setting. Later on, her landlord revealed that he had connections with museum programs. He was able to put her in contact with internship opportunities. This was the beginning of her career in museum education.

While growing up, Robert did not think that he would work in a museum. He stated that “never in my wildest dreams [did I think] about...working in museums” (Robert, transcription, p. 16). During high school, Robert did consider becoming a teacher. After completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts, he applied for a job at a science museum and really did not believe he would get the job—but he did. After completing his

teaching degree, he needed employment and acquired an education position at the Canada Aviation Museum. Once he had his master's degree in art education, he started working in the fine arts museum where is still employed.

Emma described her path into the art world as rhizomatic. With a desire to start earning an income, she picked up a local newspaper, looked in the classifieds, and stumbled on an opening at an advertising firm, which she successfully applied for. She worked in an arts and culture position following this and eventually focused more on art education in her work and studies. One day, a friend working at an artist-run center asked her if she would like to start working on an outreach project at the center. She continues to work there today.

Similarly, I only started considering museum education as a career choice at the very end of my undergraduate degree. I found out about the profession by chance through searching for graduate programs in the arts that could be an alternative to art history and curatorial studies. I started working as an educator at the Art Gallery of Ontario after this discovery. The subsequent work that I did in museum education was also due to serendipitous encounters.

Johnson (2009) reminds us that the work involved in the museum education profession is not commonly understood and often not even known by the general public. She shares a story to illustrate this:

While attending a social function, someone I don't know comes up to me, we introduce ourselves, and the person asks "what do you do?" I answer that I'm a museum educator at a local history museum. "Oh," comes the reply, followed by the questions I always dread, "What does that mean, and what exactly do you do?" I only dislike the questions because it is so hard to briefly explain to someone all the different activities that are included in my job. I'm most likely talking to a person who until a few moments ago didn't even know there were educators in museums. (p. 7)

Because of the general lack of knowledge of the fascinating work of museum educators, it makes sense that the majority of museum educators find this profession by stumbling upon it. I think it is safe to say that it is rare that museum educators know that they want to pursue this career very early in life. They often fortuitously fall upon the field.

Furthermore, once they discovered the museum education field, all the participants in this study saw it as an exceptional alternative to the areas they had worked in previously or were educated in. All of the participants started in the art museum education profession with diverse backgrounds and found this profession to be a better fit for their particular skills, traits, and education than the professions they had originally set out to pursue. Elsa B. Bailey's (2006) conversation with a fellow museum educator reveals this undulating, irregular career path as being very typical in this field:

A number of years ago I related the story of my professional career path to a seasoned colleague. As I was sure that mine must be a distinctly unusual path, I was quite surprised by my colleague's response. "Well," he said, "that's a pretty typical story!" When asked to expand further on his comment, he explained that what was typical was the circuitous and multi-dimensional nature of my interests and career track. (pp. 175-176)

The sinuous path that led the participants in this study to the museum education profession is common and potentially even desirable.

Highlights Related to Museum Education Positions

Relationships with Visitors

The museum educator is a public servant with a capital "P" who interacts with many individuals and communities representative of the complex layers of our society. (Henry, 2006, p. 223)

All of the participants, except Camille, referred to opportunities to develop relationships with visitors as being a primary highlight of their jobs. Camille's position is

focused on planning and managing, which keeps her behind the scenes more than the other participants. Daniel, Emma, Robert, and I all spoke of the joy we get from interacting with visitors on a regular basis in our museum education work.

Daniel emphasized that his quest to make museum visits more interactive than passive is a highlight of his job. He enjoys looking at and talking about art *with* visitors in this effort. He described this interaction as being a major highlight of his work.

Emma's primary highlight in her work at the artist-run center was a partnership with a community group, which lasted three years. She calls this a highlight because of the positive long-term relationships that she developed with these community group members. The relationship was built around fostering an atmosphere conducive to collaboration, which is a primary element of Emma's teaching philosophy.

Due to changes within his museum, Robert has been afforded more opportunities to interact with visitors, as he typically works behind the scenes. He refers to this change as a new highlight of his job: "...I am just working with actual people on site. It is really, really fun" (Robert, transcription, p. 18).

One of the main highlights that I cited is the chance to share stories with visitors. I enjoy hearing the narratives that visitors bring with them to the museum and sharing my own stories when appropriate. It is this two-way relationship built around narrative that is a major highlight of my work in museum education

In a study conducted by Elsa B. Bailey, when asked about the positive aspects of their work, museum educators cited interaction with the public as one of the prominent highlights. They referred to the "satisfaction of working with enthusiastic audiences" (p. 191) and the opportunity for "social interaction with the public" (p. 191). Likewise, when

asked about the rewards they receive from their museum education positions, the vast majority of respondents in Chen Cooper's study—89.9%—referred to being “able to interact with people” (2007, p. 70). Talboys (2005) has referred this opportunity to interact with visitors as a particularly fulfilling portion of the museum education job:

This can be a highly satisfying, hands-on, part of the job, not least because of the opportunity it presents for exercising a wide range of skills in a wide range of teaching situations. There are also opportunities for instant feedback and for learning more about the efficacy of the teaching environment. (p. 21)

Emma, Daniel, Robert, and I would certainly agree with this assertion.

With the relatively recent major changes in the role and status of museum education in the museum, there has been an increasing consensus that museum educators are an important link between the museum and its public, where dialogue and engagement are central to the effort. Yet, as Chen Cooper (2007) has noted, many museum educators' daily duties tend to focus on both educational and administrative practices, much of which is behind the scenes. However, even the behind the scenes duties are typically public-focused, aiming to ignite visitors' curiosities and encourage meaning-making. As Robert has noted, managerial positions often require museum educators to work in an office space rather than on the floor. He feels that his recent task of engaging with the public in teaching activities is a welcome change. This hands-on opportunity to interact with the public's museum educators program for is valuable and many deem this to be one of the key highlights of their positions.

Power Redistribution

It is wonderful to be working in museums—at long last audiences are being given the priority they deserve. (Black, 2005, p. ix)

All of the participants in this study referred to handing over power to their visitors as a highlight of their work. With this redistribution of power, they witness visitors becoming increasingly confident and autonomous with their experiences with art. Being a part of this transformation is clearly a rewarding aspect of their jobs. Essentially, these museum educators are thrilled when they are able to engage visitors in ways that enable them to take control of their learning, and these experiences often affect visitors in potentially lasting ways.

For Daniel, one of the essential highlights of museum work is the opportunity to witness visitors experiencing epiphanies with artworks under his guidance. He refers to their world becoming richer as a result. He noted that such positive experiences become even more rewarding when visitors are able to apply the tools that they were introduced to in new learning situations, making them independent in future encounters with art. Such independence affords visitors opportunities to assume control and power in the museum learning experience.

Camille referred to the exciting programming at her gallery that enables certain groups of people to become engaged in extensive activities at the gallery. In these activities, the gallery becomes their own space and they direct the events. Camille noted that this requires the gallery employees to hand over a significant amount of power and ownership to these participants.

Robert is excited about the increasing attention being paid to free-choice learning in his museum. In this approach, more power is being given to the visitors, as they choose

the direction their visits take. Robert noted that this challenges the typical hierarchical model found in museums.

A major highlight for Emma is the opportunity to work collaboratively with visitors. The most significant example of this was her work with the adult literacy group, in which the gallery members and the community group members collaborated. This project focused on the equal distribution of power between the two organizations, whereby both groups learned from and with each other. Emma described her experience as being exceptionally meaningful for this reason.

In reflecting on the highlights of my work, I referred to listening to visitors' stories. Through the emphasis on visitors' narratives, power is redistributed and visitors see the importance of their contributions and can take control of their museum experiences. I pointed out that this is often empowering for visitors, especially those who do not frequent museums.

The museum world has seen a dramatic and exciting shift in the perception of visitors. Whereas museums were traditionally seen as purveyors of knowledge and guardians of precious, valuable objects, today museums are increasingly viewing their visitors as participants in the construction of knowledge. As Jennifer Wild Czajkowski and Shiralee Hudson Hill (2008) noted,

The museum model has slowly been moving away from that of authoritative lecturer before a passive audience to that of a partner in dialogue with interested, engaged community members. (p. 255)

In other words, the museum is becoming more and more visitor-centered. Museum educators are considered to be the individuals most capable of enabling this visitor-centered approach, since, as Anna Johnson (2009) noted, "Placing the visitor's

experience above all else is the essence of museum education” (p. 11). Betty Lou Williams (2007) stated that within “this new paradigm, education in museums is not a subsidiary measure; rather it has become central in policy and practice” (p. 62).

The participants in this study would agree with Graham Black’s (2005) assertion that this is a particularly exciting time to be working in museums, especially for museum educators. There are many ways in which museums are working to place museum visitors as the center of experiences, thereby increasing their power in the museum. Visitor-centered strategies such as dialogue-based interactions, community collaborations, free-choice learning, and narrative-based approaches have frequently been cited in the literature (Black, 2005; Conwill & Roosa, 2003; Falk & Dierking, 2000; Jeffers, 2003; Roberts, 1997, to name a few). The participants in this study noted that implementing these power-shifting approaches is a highlight of their positions.

Ongoing Learning about Art

Art museum education is an appealing profession. Where else can an educator who has a passion for art find the opportunity to work directly with art...? (Pond, 1988, p. 11)

All of the participants referred to the enjoyment they receive from pinpointing intriguing programming ideas that connect visitors to an exhibition’s content. To achieve this, these participants are charged with the task of learning about the art on display, which often changes on a regular basis. They cited this opportunity for ongoing learning related to art as a primary highlight of their jobs.

Camille explained that what initially drew her to working in museums was the opportunity for ongoing learning due to the fact that exhibitions in museums tend to rotate regularly. This constant refreshment and chance to grow is a joy for her. She

believes that this exciting aspect of museum education work can help museum educators stay in the profession for significant lengths of time.

One of the primary highlights of Emma's job is the opportunity to work with "current" art. Emma's gallery features the work of emerging and experimental artists, which she finds exceptionally stimulating. She feels that working with such current art affords her many entry-points for connecting the work to visitors' lives.

Daniel referred to the fact that exhibitions are constantly changing in his museum as a wonderful challenge in his work. According to Daniel, the novelty of exhibition rotation constantly allows him to learn new information about art.

With the recent increase in the amount of time that Robert spends working with visitors on the floor, he has had to dedicate more time to learning about the collections on display, art history, and trends in contemporary art, so he can effectively engage with audiences. For Robert, this is a new highlight of his job.

I referred to the chance to engage with contemporary art and artists on a regular basis as being a primary highlight of my work with museum education. This engagement with art connects me with my background in art history and my particular passion for contemporary art. I view this opportunity for ongoing learning with and about art as an extension of my art history degree.

In her research on science museum educators' roles, identities, and practices, Bailey's (2006) participants cited the extensive learning opportunities, variety, and change associated with their jobs as being essential highlights. She stated that the museum educators in her study showed "evidence of having a highly developed sense of curiosity and eagerness to learn new things" (p. 193). The same is certainly true of the art

museum educators in this doctoral study. Likewise, Anna Johnson (2009) cited “[c]reativity, enthusiasm, and a love of learning” (p. 11) as key characteristics of museum educators. The above-mentioned participants specifically referred to a “love of learning” related to the visual arts. In Chen’s dissertation, most of her respondents—82.2%—said that their work in museum education was enjoyable because of the opportunity to be surrounded by art (2004). The participants in my dissertation study clearly share this curiosity about and love for the arts.

Collaboration with Colleagues

Increased understanding of diverse professional concerns, and compromise, rather than hierarchies and control, are [museums’] modus operandi. (Wild Czajkowski & Hudson Hill, 2008, p. 256)

All of the participants in this study said the chance to collaborate with colleagues was a joy related to their work. The participants have great working relationships with certain colleagues and are often afforded opportunities to collaborate with these professionals. The processes of brainstorming, reflecting, and generating intriguing content in collaboration with colleagues were frequently mentioned.

Camille referred to a particularly collaborative relationship that she has with the public programs coordinator at her gallery. According to Camille, these two colleagues are able to produce high-caliber work together due to the alignment of their visions for museum education. She also referred to the close collaborative relationship she has with the curator at her gallery. Again, Camille mentioned that her visions and goals for museum programming are aligned with this practitioner’s. Because of this incredible affinity, Camille and her curator have been so enthusiastic about collaborating that they

have continuously developed innovative programming as a team on their own time as side projects.

Daniel referred to working with his team of front-line museum educators as “a very great, positive aspect to [his] job” (Daniel, transcription, p. 34). His museum educator colleagues share similar visions for and approaches to pedagogy in museum settings. The relationship between Daniel and these colleagues is so positive that he describes them as friends. He also referred to the positive collaborations that he has engaged in with curators at this gallery.

In Robert’s museum, museum educators work closely with each other. This has become more evident recently with the shifts that have been developing in the department of education. This department is now organized into audience teams, allowing for more extensive collaborative work between educators. Robert feels that because of this, more discussion, creativity, efficiency, and a sense of support will evolve.

It is clear that one of the primary highlights of Emma’s work is the opportunity to collaborate with the team of employees at her artist-run center. The small number of employees and the structure of this artist-run center enable these workers to collaborate on many levels. Emma described her working environment as highly participatory, process-oriented, and lacking hierarchy. During our interviews, she frequently and passionately referred to collaboration as being central to her teaching and learning philosophies. She affirmed that she personally thrives in environments and relationships that are built on collaboration.

I too referred to the nourishment I receive from collaborating with colleagues in museum environments. The development of programming in brainstorming sessions with

gallery directors and curators is a highlight of my work. I noted that the innovative programming ideas that I have developed with colleagues have been particularly creative, meaningful, and successful because they were formed through collaboration.

Bailey (2006) found that the museum educators she interviewed reported:

...a strong sense of community and collegiality within their institutions. They discussed being supported by their co-workers, sensing how everyone was working toward the same goal, sharing a common approach, and the feeling of being among friends. (p. 184)

Similarly, the five participants in this study revealed that they have many opportunities to collaborate in their positions, which they feel is a joyful component of their work. Some said that collaboration with individuals outside of the education department was particularly rewarding. This is very encouraging, since interdepartmental collaboration is often lacking in museums, or even feared. Chen Cooper (2007) noted that many of her participants “felt they were underappreciated by other divisions” (p. 71) and referred to frustrations related to a lack of collaboration in their positions:

Many art museum educators were frustrated by issues related to a lack of communication. They revealed that weak departmental or collegial collaboration sometimes made their jobs difficult to complete. (2007, p. 71)

Chen Cooper called for each museum division to “establish a common ground that encourages open communication without hierarchal or political discriminations” (p. 72).

Willumson (2007) also made a plea for internal collaboration between curators and educators to diminish the hierarchical divide between these areas of museum work. And Gary Edson and David Dean (1996) have called on museums to increase collaboration between education departments and other departments and even those outside of the museum community. They believe that such collaboration is necessary for the development of museum education and museums in general. It is their contention that

“Cross-fertilization of ideas will stimulate the thinking process, generate a feeling of inclusiveness, and provide the basis for information exchange” (p. 200). The fact that the participants in my study described numerous opportunities for collaboration in their positions and viewed these opportunities as a highlight of their jobs is very encouraging.

Challenges Related to Museum Education Positions

Multitasking

Because of the great variety of activities, museum educators work in a multifaceted world that requires creativity, multitasking, intense involvement with people (staff, volunteers, visitors), and fluctuating responsibilities. The challenges are exciting and stimulating; however, the pressure can cause burnout. (Johnson, 2009, p. 10)

Emma, Robert, and I cited the need for extensive and elaborate multitasking in our jobs as a primary challenge. The museum education positions that these practitioners hold have a large variety of duties, many of which require significant amounts of time and a wide range of skills. These three educators said they were often overwhelmed with the amount of work that is associated with their positions due to the great amount of multitasking required.

Emma referred to the need to be like an “octopus” in her artist-run center, since everyone working at this center is required to take on a number of roles and needs a number of skills. Due to the center’s collaboration-based structure, all of the employees contribute to a wide range of sectors. Furthermore, mundane tasks, such as washing the floors, are divided among the employees. Because Emma is the only educator at the gallery and because they have hired her on a part-time basis, she is often extraordinarily busy on the days that she works there.

Robert feels that the multiple tasks and deadlines associated with his job leave him feeling that he constantly needs to catch up. This gives him little time for professional development and reflection.

I referred to the need to play a very wide variety of roles in my work as an educator in small gallery settings. Because of the small size of the galleries and the serious lack of funding, I have been engaged as the sole educator in these settings, leaving me with a large amount of work in a wide variety of areas.

The art museum educators participating in Chen Cooper's (2004) doctoral research cited insufficient resources relating to time, funding, and staff as the primary frustration in their work. They reported that they had far too much work and not enough time, leaving them with a lack of energy and a greater potential for "burnout." Similarly, Bailey's participants referred to feelings of "often being overwhelmed in terms of their ability to complete all their responsibilities and juggle multiple and time-intensive projects" (2006, p. 192). Johnson (2009), quoted above, pointed out that, although this multiplicity of tasks can be exciting, it can undeniably lead to exhaustion.

Like Robert, several of Chen Cooper's (2004) participants felt that the extensive multitasking and deadlines in their jobs leave them with far too little time for professional development. Johnson (2009) reminds us how important it is for museum educators to have time to engage in ongoing professional development in order to "keep current with the field and participate in conversations that will shape the future" (p. 13). It is clear that this is a difficult task when the responsibilities of museum educators are so varied and heavy due to a lack of resources.

Different Ways of Thinking

Of course, whoever is appointed to provide an education service must work within the set-up as it is. This will range from hostile to supportive...(Talboys, 2005, p. 20)

All of the participants mentioned difficulties they had faced with misalignments between their visions for programming and those of colleagues or collaborators. These participants referred to such challenges arising with curators, directors, docents, artists, and fellow educators. In all cases, the issues were directly related to a lack of consensus on the purpose of museum education. Ultimately, these museum educators expressed that they have faced challenges related to the continued circulation of older conceptions of the role of education in art museums.

Camille expressed the greatest strife regarding misaligned visions between her director and herself. In her view, the director promotes traditional education activities rather than innovative, visitor-centered, process-oriented education. Camille noted that her director, along with other members of upper management at her gallery, claim that they are in search of change at the gallery, yet they are afraid of change. She attributes this to an older way of thinking that has a limited grasp of the possibilities for museum education. Furthermore, managers with little to no experience with education often have a large say in the direction that educational programming will take in her gallery, which is obviously frustrating for Camille.

Although Daniel does not interact with the curators at his place of work very often, the times that he has worked with them have led to very good outcomes. He describes these practitioners as very helpful and professional. However, he did note some challenges relating to curatorial decisions that do not take educational programming into

consideration. He discussed an example when the curatorial decisions posed safety risks and accessibility issues for the young children visiting the gallery for educational programs. However, this resulted in a fruitful discussion between the curators and educators, again demonstrating the respect these two teams of professionals have for each other.

Robert referred to the challenges he has faced when attempting to encourage some of his front-line staff and volunteers to engage in cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning in museums, such as Visual Thinking Strategies. Such approaches often ask educators to eliminate traditional teacher-to-learner transaction approaches. Rather, the innovative strategies Robert mentioned focus on visitors' making of meaning. This typically requires a paradigmatic shift in traditional thought relating to education and learning. When he comes upon such resistance, Robert finds it difficult to maintain consistency in programming. Additionally, he has noted that he and his fellow educators face the challenge of persuading curatorial staff to become open to allowing educators to experiment with innovative educational programming. He described this as a hefty job in some respects.

Emma has dealt with challenges relating to the decisions that artists sometimes make during the setup of their exhibitions. There have been a number of instances where artists have chosen to display their work in a way that makes it difficult for visitors to experience. This often leads to restrictions in the potential educational programming that Emma can develop. These artists seemed to value the art object and its place within the gallery more than accessibility, and consequently, visitors' experiences.

There have been very few times when I have experienced significant challenges regarding decision-making for educational programming with colleagues or collaborators. However, in the case of the educational programming I developed for a community group working with computer skills and exploring workers' rights, the gallery programmer reminded me several times that it was important to her that I not spend a significant amount of time working with them on computer skills. She emphasized that the promotion and exploration of contemporary art and artist-run center culture needed to be the primary focus of the educational program. At the same time, the community group educator clearly desired an educational program that focused on exploring relevant computer skills and workers' rights through the entry-point of contemporary art. It was very challenging to strike a balance between these differing needs and visions. According to my perceptions, it seemed that the gallery programmer was struggling in her efforts to place visitor needs at the forefront of educational programming. However, it should be noted that I still find her visions and efforts to collaborate to be rather progressive.

It is clear that museum education practices are favoring visitor-centered experiences and process-oriented endeavors. This is starkly divergent from previous notions of museum education, which were partial to object-centered approaches, with teacher-to-student transactions, leaning towards defined outcomes. As Mary Ellen Munley and Randy Roberts (2006) report, "The once familiar 'collect, preserve, and interpret' mission that dominated twentieth century museums shifted toward a new audience-centered focus" (p. 31). Educators often struggle in their attempts to show curators, directors, top-level management in non-education-related areas, occasionally

artists, and even some educators and volunteers how important it is to engage with this newer conception of museum education.

As Talboys (2005) explained, “Many museum staff have fixed and sometimes outmoded ideas about education” (p. 22). Glenn Willumson (2007) contended that traditionalists have resisted the changes in the perspectives on the role of education in museums and the new ideology promoting progressive education in museums: “...traditionalists suggested that museums have lost their way, drifting from their primary responsibility as locations in which objects of the highest quality are selected and preserved for the public” (p. 90). Central to these progressive changes is a focus on audience experience rather than on object primacy. This new focus is of the utmost importance to the majority of today’s museum educators and is often promoted in theory by other sectors of the museum. However, in practice, other museum workers often do not see the importance of implementing innovative educational programming. This boils down to differences of opinion regarding what education in museums truly is. Betty Lou Williams (2007) noted that a number of directors still believe that “collecting, researching, displaying, or selling reproductions” (p. 62) is sufficient to fulfill the museum’s goal of educating the public. This is often associated with the retention of factual knowledge rather than meaning-making and “contextual understanding and personal experience” (p. 62), which are the essence of new museum education practices. It is Willumson’s (2007) contention that collaborative practices are the solution to discrepancies in visions. He specifically refers to the dynamic between curators and educators, though I believe his argument also applies to the other players in museum

practices who may still uphold object primacy when discussing the purpose and role of museums in society.

Contemporary Roles of Museum Educators

Audience experts

Consideration of audience is not always on the minds of other staff, making the role of educator as visitor advocate an essential function in all museums.
(Johnson, 2009, p. 11)

When asked about the contemporary roles of museum educators, Emma, Robert, Daniel, and I immediately referred to museum educators as being visitor advocates within the museum, since these practitioners have a particular expertise in audience engagement. These participants view museum educators as the key catalysts in a change of focus from traditional object-centered, fact-heavy approaches to visitor-centered visions.

Emma emphasized that museum educators are now aiming to offer a “territory for active interpretation from the part of the visitors” (p. 26) rather than simply attempting to force visitors to like an artwork. According to Emma, museum educators have knowledge of methods for promoting visitor engagement and eventual visitor autonomy.

Robert views museum educators as audience experts, who know what visitors’ needs are and how best to respond to them. He believes that, at this time, an effective way of achieving this is to offer free-choice learning experiences that are holistic and intuitive.

Daniel views museum educators as being required to make museums more accessible to a variety of publics. He notes that other museum professionals may also have this in mind, but museum educators have the specific knowledge and experiences that can best engage a wide variety of museum publics and offer them comfortable learning experiences.

Like Daniel, I too referred to museum educators as possessing the necessary knowledge to engage a wide variety of audiences in meaningful experiences. I also elucidated my belief that museum educators are the workers who are helping other museum professionals to become aware of the possibilities of engaging wide varieties of audience members in meaningful learning experiences.

According to these museum practitioners, the role of today's museum educator is to be an expert in audience engagement. As Chen Cooper (2007) reminds us, museum educators "share a great responsibility for making art museums more accessible and facilitating positive museum experiences" (p. 68) for visitors. Barbara Henry (2006) sees museum educators as "advocates for issues related to communications, way finding, orientation, visitor comfort needs, and customer service..." (p. 230). Naturally, this means that museum educators are expected to have a deep understanding of their audiences. In 1985, Jensen and Munley stated that museum educators should aim to become learning-communication specialists, and that this would occur when they become "knowledgeable about the audience, learning, and philosophies of education" (p. 13). Especially since the late 1980s, visitor studies and audience evaluation measures have been primary concerns of museum educators, demonstrating the centrality of audience knowledge and methods for successful engagement in this profession (Black, 2005; Hein, 1998). Nearly three decades after Jensen and Munley's plea, the participants in this study confirmed that expertise in audience needs and methods for engagement are a primary goal and role for these museum educators.

Ultimately, these participants shared their belief that museum educators are the professionals who have, or who should have, the necessary knowledge and tools for

engaging wide varieties of audience members and communities in meaningful experiences with art and museums. This specialized knowledge assists museums in understanding the needs and entry-points for engaging the widest variety of communities in museum encounters and promoting the most dialogic, comfortable, respectful, and meaningful experiences for these audiences. As Barbara Henry (2006) pointed out:

It is the responsibility of the educator to reflect the needs and complexities of a changing society by shaping content and interpretation toward relevant issues and creating broad, respectful dialogue among citizens. (p. 37)

Museum educators are thus primary players in museums' attempts to contribute to meaningful and positive change in their communities and in society in general.

Exhibition design

Educators can greatly contribute to every phase of the exhibition development process. They offer insight and knowledge of the visitor perspective, and their involvement undoubtedly enhances the final product. (Grove, 2009, p. 150)

Assistance with exhibition development is a flourishing role for museum educators, which a number of participants referred to. Robert and Camille very explicitly outlined this as an important upcoming role for museum educators. Daniel did not directly refer to exhibition design in his description of the contemporary role of museum educators, but he did mention occasionally being intimately involved in exhibition conception. Likewise, I briefly referred to an exhibition that I worked on and also said that I would like to continue to have opportunities to explore this role in the future. On the other hand, Emma clearly communicated the fact that she is comfortable with not being involved in exhibition choices.

Robert identified exhibition development as an increasingly important role for art museum educators. He believes that museums are becoming more astute about the

possibilities of involving educators in the development of exhibitions. For Robert, museum educators can offer interpretive plans to help create a dialogue with audiences, based on the main messages and key benefits of a show.

Camille conveyed her feeling that there should be more of a connection between curatorial and educational efforts. She believes that education should be infused into the curatorial process. It is her contention that this is a major future role for museum educators, especially since many of today's curators want to engage in collaborative partnerships and are open to doing so with educators.

Daniel referred to a pedagogically focused exhibition that he developed at his museum, which required him to work in close collaboration with curators. This again suggests that more museum educators are having opportunities to become involved in the development of exhibitions.

I too referenced my experience working on the development of an exhibition, where I was given an opportunity to infuse educational objectives into the exhibition itself. It is my belief that more opportunities such as this may arise for museum educators in the future and I wholly embrace this.

There have been more references in the museum education literature to educators engaging in exhibition development in collaboration with curators. Jennifer Wild Czajkowski and Shiralee Hudson Hill (2008) believe that, as museums' priorities shift to becoming more focused on igniting "visitors' imaginations, ideas, and emotions and encouraging self-reflection and social engagement" (p. 256), museum educators have begun to assume greater roles in decisions concerning exhibition choices and display:

Addressing new priorities requires new expertise, organizational structures, and roles. In the past, curators have generally made all key decisions about art gallery

installations; other staff members supported the curator's vision. With the current shift in direction at art museums, interdisciplinary teams of curators, educators, designers, evaluators, and project managers are being asked to collaboratively re-imagine gallery installations and exhibition programs. (p. 256)

Similarly, Tim Grove (2009) noted that "Many museums today recognize that educators can contribute to the exhibition development process in more ways than traditionally thought" (p. 141).

Many authors have recently claimed that collaboration is the key to developing successful exhibitions with learning in mind (Grove, 2009; Wild Czajkowski & Hudson Hill, 2008; Willumson, 2007). John Reeve (2006) believes that museums operating with a very clear hierarchy will naturally have difficulty successfully creating exhibits with education in mind: "The real acid of the problem usually is the power structure of the museum or gallery" (p. 185). Wild Czajkowski and Hudson Hill (2008) noted that understanding, and finding commonalities and cooperation are needed across disciplines. Willumson (2007) believes that museum educators have the skills required to initiate such imperative collaborative endeavors:

Educators have always worked collaboratively with docents, visitors, teachers, school groups, and curators, to name just a few of the educational constituencies. Curators, on the other hand, have been trained as scholars and rewarded for a largely isolated practice that has generated significant art historical insight. Their expertise is hard-won, but largely personal. A healthy collaboration between educators and curators holds the promise of expanding the curatorial audience and of unlocking varied approaches to the artwork. Museum educators, with their special training and their tradition of speaking for the visitor, offer the best hope of establishing an institutional model of collaboration that values the expertise of both the curator and the visitor. (p. 93)

These authors' assertions relating to the important role that museum educators are increasingly taking in exhibition development through collaborations with curatorial teams coincide with the observations and opinions shared by my participants.

Visions for Education and Professional Development

Putting Theory into Practice

Teaching in the gallery, in situations where the educator facilitates more thoughtful visitor experiences with works of art, is the most direct and rewarding way to understand the potential and reality of museum education. (Brigham, Blume, & Knowles, 1988, p. 9)

All of the participants emphasized how important hands-on practice in museum education situations is for pre-service education and in-service development. The importance of the mingling of theory and practice through internships, direct interactions with the public, and hands-on workshops was discussed.

Numerous times during our interviews, Camille fervently endorsed internships as part of the pre-service education of museum educators. She believes they help future museum educators to link theory and practice. According to Camille, it is essential to engage in real-life situations during pre-service education in order to discover effective means for dealing with the real challenges that are faced in museum education.

Daniel referred to how important he feels it is for all museum educators to work directly with audience members and with the works of art in the galleries from time to time. He noted that it is common for educators who are situated in office settings to spend too little time or even no time at all with the public, due to their already crowded schedules. Daniel feels that it is thus easy for these educators to become somewhat disconnected from the purpose of the profession—engaging with the public.

According to Emma, a strong foundation in art interpretation is essential for the preparation of museum educators. She believes this is imperative if museum educators are to avoid merely transferring information to visitors. However, Emma made it very clear that she is convinced that having the theoretical background is not enough—

museum educators need opportunities to implement these approaches in practical situations.

Robert articulated his belief that knowledge related to interpretive planning and teaching strategies is essential for museum educators. Like the other participants, Robert emphasized that educators need opportunities to test these strategies out in practice. Like Camille, he cited internships as a perfect method for educating future museum educators. Although Robert did not refer to the importance of hands-on experience with the public for all educators when asked about the education and professional development of museum educators, he clearly feels this is a worthwhile practice. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Robert believes that his recent opportunity to work more directly with the public has been very beneficial in enabling him to return to implementing theories, and also allowed him to reconnect to his passion for teaching art.

I also referred to the importance of having a strong background in educational theory and teaching strategies along with opportunities to put these into practice. I emphasized implementation of approaches when discussing the education and development of museum educators, one example being hands-on workshops.

The participants referred to the need to be knowledgeable about pedagogical strategies that are specifically suited for museum education environments rather than just strategies more often employed in formal education settings. Opportunities for hands-on implementation of these strategies with museum publics are clearly important to the participants in this study. This might come in the form of specific museum education internships for pre-service museum educators. Amanda Arner and Kendra Lanza-Kaduce (2012) contend that, although highly necessary, a postsecondary degree “does not replace

the life lessons and skills gained through on-the-job experience” (p. 34) in museums. In reference to the education of museum educators, Brigham et al. (1988) stressed that “Internship opportunities that emphasize teaching are vital” (p. 9). They emphasized that in these internships, new museum educators should have opportunities to watch “master teachers” in action, to practice teaching, to experiment with a variety of techniques, and to receive frequent feedback from their mentors.

The participants also noted that in-service museum educators, including those who typically work behind the scenes, need opportunities to engage in hands-on teaching in museum settings. Brigham et al. (1988) state that

...the ability to teach with objects, while it may take many forms, is essential for an art museum educator. There is no substitute for live teaching in the galleries to provide that experience. Facing real people and trying to help them connect to works of art compel the teacher to plan, try, and alter his or her approaches. Learners’ reactions provide quick feedback. Experience builds quickly as the teacher tries alternative strategies, expands the range of art subjects, and reaches diverse audiences. (p. 9)

In a study she conducted on how museum educators learn how to teach, M. Christine Castle (2006) found that significant time spent on on-site teaching is crucial for the development of museum teachers. The participants in my dissertation study would agree with Castle’s participants and would expand on this by suggesting that all museum educators should have time to engage in on-site teaching throughout their careers. According to them, this enables museum educators to test the strategies being promoted in museum education departments, to engage with the evolving content in the galleries, and to ground themselves in the essence of museum education—meaningful engagement with the public.

Learning Community

Joining professional organizations (on the local, state, and national levels), participating in the programs, attending conferences, and networking are all behaviors museum educators can use to keep current with the field and participate in conversations that will shape the future. (Johnson, 2009, p. 13)

The development of a community of learners was revealed as an important component of professional development by most of the participants in this study.

Camille, Daniel, Robert, and I mentioned participation in conferences, special workshops with experts, and ongoing dialogues with colleagues as essential for the successful professional development of museum educators.

According to Camille, attending conferences in the field is an invaluable practice. She feels this offers opportunities for museum educators to share practical and theoretical information with other professionals in the domain, and enables them to discover the work that others are doing.

Daniel has appreciated the specialized programs that his museum has organized for the education department's staff. In these programs, experts guide museum educators on how to work on or with special projects, publics, and/or approaches. Knowledge regarding best practices and the challenges experienced by these experts has been helpful for Daniel in his work.

Similarly, Robert feels that engaging in specialized workshops with instructors, both within the museum setting and at conferences and retreats, is essential in order to be aware of what other museums are doing and to engage in benchmarking. Robert has greatly appreciated such opportunities to engage in stimulating exchanges with like-minded individuals, and believes such practices can lead to positive change in museum education.

Likewise, I outlined how important my participation in conferences in the field has been to my own professional development. Opportunities to share what worked, what failed, methods for improvement, and best practices with colleagues and specialized experts have been essential for my development.

Sharing of information is an essential practice for the professional development of museum educators. As Talboys (2005) reminds us, museum educators are often isolated in their work and pushed to the sidelines of the institution. Johnson (2009) calls for museum educators to join professional organizations, attend conferences, network, and engage in dialogues about the future of the profession. According to her, museum educators can begin to take more prominent roles in the museum world by engaging in such activities. She elucidated her claim as follows: “Educators need to step forward, define and discuss education, document it, and sustain an ongoing conversation” (p. 14) in order to advance the profession. Pond (1988) contented that museum educators need to have clearer lines of communication between practitioners engaging in best practices in order to support visionary thinking and help avoid isolation and, ultimately, burnout. Writing nearly two decades later, Castle (2006) believes that there is still a great need for more effective communication among museum education practitioners from various institutions:

There is an associated need for more training and ongoing education *across* institutions of informal learning under the auspices of regional consortia of museums and association of museum workers or through written case studies of teaching practice. (p. 131)

Offering museum educators substantial and frequent opportunities to engage in dialogues with colleagues and experts that explore both theory and practice in museum education is an essential component of professional development according to the above-mentioned

participants and authors. Such practices offer these professionals a support system, encourage growth, and foster leadership.

Self-Reflection for Development

In order to effect innovative and sustainable change within your institution, you must take time to understand yourself as a leader. Self reflection is the key.
(Nolan, 2009b, p. 177)

All of the participants in this research noted that, by participating in this study, they were afforded an opportunity to engage in deep self-reflection processes. It was observed that this was a form of professional development that is not typically offered in their jobs, especially due to the tight schedules they must work with.

Camille said that, by engaging in this research project, she was able to examine her past decisions; she believes that this process of examination may help shape her future choices. It is her belief that she is naturally self-reflective, which made this process easy for her. She also believes that museum educators who are not so inclined to naturally engage in self-reflection practices would greatly benefit from working with such in-depth narrative-based processes. She is particularly curious about the responses of the other participants in this study and imagines that, by pinpointing links and divergences in multiple museum educators' paths, we can come to a greater understanding of what is needed for pre-service and in-service education of these professionals.

Daniel said that there have been significant changes in the museum world recently. He feels that museum educators sometimes do not notice the deep impact of these changes, since they can be so immersed in their work. It is his contention that, by participating in deep self-reflection through projects such as this, museum educators can

become more aware of and engaged with their changing institutions, as well as more in tune with the broader context of their work.

Similarly, according to Robert, this project gave him the time and space he needed to reflect on the path that led him to where he is today and on his priorities and values. This life history project helped him to step back from the busyness of his daily life on the job in order to see the bigger picture, which is often a difficult task. It also enabled him to reflect on the direction he would like to take his future work in, and why.

Emma stated that this project enabled her to engage in a self-reflective process. Unlike Camille, Emma feels that she is not naturally inclined to engage in such personal history reflections. She describes herself as more of a doer than a thinker. Furthermore, she feels that she often does not have enough time to engage in such activities on her own. She feels that it was beneficial to voice the path that led her to where she is today.

Likewise, I referred to this process as offering me a forum to explore my lived experiences in depth. I mentioned that, by bringing museum educators' experiences and insights about their trajectories and their practices to the forefront, we can promote substantial growth in the profession. Additionally, I highlighted how important such self-reflective practices are for individuals who aim to create optimal experiences for publics.

The participants in this dissertation research described how rewarding it was to engage in deep self-reflection related to their careers. They shared how taking a step back from their daily work to examine how they got to their positions, what it is they do, and why they do what they do, helped them to pinpoint core values and enabled them to look at the larger context of their work. Tina Nolan (2009b) has written about the importance of museum educators assuming leadership roles within their institutions so they can move

from the margins of museums to their centers. One recommendation she has for museum educators is for them to craft a personal vision for themselves. She calls for museum educators to engage in dynamic reflection in order to do this:

Draw on what you have read about leadership as you begin to *define or redefine your leadership characteristics*. Journal about what you read, even if you think you are not a good writer. Reflect on your thinking and writing, revise, and write some more. Let others you trust implicitly read what you have written. Begin a dialogue about leadership. (p. 177)

Similarly, Vicky Woollard (2006) urged museum educators to obtain greater “self-awareness” in relation to the skills they already have and how to access education opportunities. She stated that “the individual is responsible for reflecting on their practice, benchmarking themselves alongside others and predicting future needs” (p. 215). Woollard has also stressed the importance of continuous self-assessment and the maintenance of a “long-term view of [one’s] work and development” (2004, p. 137).

As demonstrated at many points throughout this dissertation, a large number of researchers in the realm of formal education feel that such self-reflective practices should include examinations of both the personal and the professional realities of practitioners (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Forsyth Townsend & Weiner, 2011; Goodson, 1981; Goodson & Gill, 2011; O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Smith-Shank, 1993; Szabad-Smyth, 2005, to name a few). From the participants’ overtly positive reactions to this research process, which gave equal attention to their personal and professional histories, it is clear that these museum educators would agree with the assertions made by the aforementioned educational researchers regarding the importance of holistic examinations of past histories in the professional development of educators.

Summary of Professional Experiences

The museum educators in this study were all attracted to art, museums, and education during their postsecondary studies, which coincides with Chen Cooper's (2007) assertion that museums are seeing an increase in museum educators who are equipped with degrees in education, museum education, and arts education, rather than solely art history. These participants fell into the world of museum education in quite serendipitous ways, finding this profession to be an ideal blend of their varied interests, skills, and previous experiences.

All of the participants clearly expressed how essential visitor-centered approaches are to them. Relationship development between visitors and educators were often cited as highlights of their jobs. Witnessing and contributing to a redistribution of power between visitors and museums was also acknowledged as a high point of their daily work. Additionally, opportunities to be immersed in the art world and to continuously learn about art were seen as essential aspects of their work. Interestingly, these highlights demonstrate a clear connection to their past education in pedagogy and the visual arts.

Oddly enough, collaborations with colleagues were seen as a highlight in some cases and a challenge in others. When both parties held similar visions of the purpose of museum education and curatorial endeavors, collaboration was a clear high point. When collaborators did not envision education as being visitor-centered, dynamic, and equal in importance to curatorial work, collaborations were difficult and taxing. A shift is occurring, and museum educators are being called upon increasingly often as audience experts and, in some cases, are starting to be invited to participate in exhibition development.

With these changes, these museum educators believe that pre-service education and in-service professional development need to offer significant opportunities for hands-on learning to bridge the gap between theory and practice. As museum educators take on greater roles in the museum, along with more tasks, these participants feel that it is essential to engage in learning communities with like-minded individuals. Furthermore, engagement in deeply self-reflective practices, such as those explored in this dissertation, was cited as a very worthy endeavor during this time of change.

The primary characteristics of these art museum educators' professional experiences are:

- A postsecondary education focusing on art and pedagogy.
- A love of developing positive and meaningful relationships with diverse publics in art museum settings, based on shared authority.
- A strong desire to engage in ongoing learning about art.
- An interest in developing positive collaborative relationships with colleagues.
- Increasing responsibilities within their professions as audience experts and contributors to exhibition development.
- An interest in hands-on learning, the development of communities of learners, and reflective practices as essential components of the professional development of museum educators.

As the museum education profession experiences great change, museum educators are being asked to assume more substantial roles and to engage in collaboration with individuals who may or may not agree with these changes or with museum educators' visions for education in these environments. By exploring the origins of

museum educators' beliefs and practices related to art museum education, and pinpointing their motivations and challenges, we can start to better understand how to approach educational programs for these professionals in order to make their transition into leadership roles as successful as possible.

This cross-case analysis revealed a number of shared experiences, choices, beliefs, and approaches related to engaging with art and museums as museum visitors and art creators, and as museum education professionals. The next chapter will summarize these links in experiences and beliefs and will explore their implications for the advancement of pre-service education programs and in-service professional development workshops.

Chapter Ten

Ending and Beginnings

Telling one's story—representing self-experience—is more than simply representing one's experience. Through the process of making and re-making the story, the image—the student/artist/maker makes the self. (Gude, 2009, p. 8)

This dissertation explored the current identities of museum educators and investigated a methodology that would focus on the lived narratives of these professionals. This was a timely undertaking, as museum educators are being asked to take on more prominent roles in their institutions in order to encourage diverse audiences to engage in meaningful museum experiences. Little attention has been paid to the identities of these museum professionals in the literature, and there have been no studies that examine their identities in a holistic, contextual, and narrative-based manner. The great changes that have been occurring in the art museum world require that we examine the contemporary identities of museum educators. It is my belief, as well as that of many contemporary identity researchers, that identity investigations need to be grounded in narrative (Alsup, 2006; Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Goodson & Gill, 2011, to name a few). In this dissertation, I set out to gather in-depth insight into the identities of five practicing museum educators by examining their personal narratives as museum visitors and creators of art and their professional experiences as museum educators. Their narratives are rich with experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, offering significant insight into the profession and strong implications for the creation of education programs for pre-service museum educators and professional development workshops for in-service ones. This chapter will explore how the insight drawn from these educators' personal and professional experiences, beliefs, and attitudes can inform education and professional

development programs for museum educators. An overview of the significance of the study and potential further research will conclude the chapter.

Implications for Education and Professional Development

Passion for Art, Museums, and Art Education

At the beginning of this dissertation, I claimed that an increasing focus is being placed on how schoolteachers' experiences as learners influence their practices as teachers (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000). I inferred that art museum educators' experiences as art creators and museum visitors have left lasting impressions on them, affecting their practices, and requiring review. The five participating museum educators' stories about their personal experiences as museum visitors and creators of art were particularly vivid and expressive, indicating that these experiences certainly did leave a lasting impression on them. Their narratives, from early life right up to the present day, were infused with a passion for art, art museums, and art education. Their early experiences in museums and with creating art were experiential and immersive, and contained elements of autonomy and encouragement. These positive experiences from their early childhoods, adolescence, and early adulthood contributed to their burgeoning passion for art and particularly learning with and through art. These early experiences hold valuable information relating to the origins of these educators' beliefs, attitudes, and practices relating to art and art museum education.

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of schoolteachers reflecting on past experiences with art. These studies often explore educators' experiences with art during their early stages of life. They typically reveal the negative experiences of pre-service or in-service generalist teachers and discuss how to help them come to terms with

these and avoid recreating such experiences in their own classrooms. Nadine Kalin (2005) reminds us that fear relating to the creation of art can often originate in early experiences with drawing within school settings. This can inevitably lead to adults who are uninterested and most likely uncomfortable with creating art and teaching art. She has urged for teachers to reflect on their previous experiences with art in order to dispel these negative thoughts and change their approaches to teaching art:

By engaging with earlier experiences, you can reflect on what these encounters have to teach you about your role as a teacher of art today so that you are not doomed to versions of teaching that you may not wish to replicate. You need to consider how your previous experiences will be replicated, transformed, ignored, and negotiated with your future students' experiences, anxieties, interests, and capabilities. (p. 20)

When discussing early art experiences with pre-service generalist teachers, Deborah Smith-Shank (1993) noted that many feel uncomfortable with art-making and teaching, and can often link these negative feelings to previous experiences with art. Many of the stories that Smith-Shank heard from pre-service schoolteachers were related to negative experiences with art teachers who often inflicted “injury on their students, not by stinging, but by subtle and often unreflective blows” (p. 45). She referred to these art teachers as “Dragons.” In her dissertation study focusing on generalist teachers' experiences with creating art and teaching art, Linda Szabad-Smyth (2002) found that her participants held deep-seated insecurities about art-making, which translated into their teaching of art. She concluded: “If teachers are to feel good about teaching art, they must first feel good about making art” (p. 184). She emphasized that pre-service education programs need to “consider the influence of pre-existing beliefs” (p. 203) about art and art education in order to see an improvement in art education in schools. Szabad-Smyth

referred to Christina Marmé Thompson's (1997) work, which examined how art was being taught in schools at the time. Thompson noted:

Those who remember art as something occasional and expendable, a source of frustration and embarrassment or intermittent respite, may continue to work under the influence of those experiences, unless their attitudes are transformed through teacher education. (p. 16)

She proposed that these beliefs need to be examined and altered through strategic teacher education programs.

The art museum educators participating in this dissertation project told a very different story—one based on a passion for art and museums that blossomed during their early lives. Rather than stories filled with Smith-Shank's "Dragons," these educators' stories were laced with transformative magic, like that initiated by a "Fairy Godmother." In fact, their stories seem extraordinary. As the above-mentioned researchers have pointed out, narratives associated with negative school art experiences, leading to uneasiness and disinterest in art, are more common. Similarly, their evocative memories of early and recent museum experiences are outside of the norm. Just because their experiences with art and museums have been largely positive does not mean that it is not worthwhile to coax them to the surface. On the contrary, insight into what led them to their current profession—their motivations—needs to be extrapolated and reflected upon. This passion for art, museums, and art education needs to be pulled to the forefront of museum educators' daily work and infused into their practice. Janet Alsup (2006) reminds us that if a "teacher tells positive stories about educational experiences, she or he might actually experience a more positive teaching life" (p. 185). Reflecting on these often thrilling positive memories can help museum educators stimulate similar experiences for their visitors. Michael Spock (2000a) pointed out the importance of

museum professionals exploring personal museum memories in order to inform their practice in positive ways:

If we examine our own museum memories and think about the stories we choose to tell, they offer important clues to our deepest, but possibly unexamined, professional convictions—what we really believe and how those beliefs can be brought to bear in a more conscious way to shape our work. (p. 30)

Specifically, Spock believes that, by reflecting on profound museum experiences, museum professionals will see the potentially powerful impact that museums can have on individuals, and strive to achieve this:

If revisiting memories of our own childhood experiences reinforces our belief that young people can be profoundly affected by museums, we will be more determined and inventive in finding ways to offer those experiences, and be more effective in advocating them in our institutions and communities. (p. 30)

It is his belief that sharing these stories will allow museum professionals to act in more authentic and determined ways:

These stories are important because, in their unguarded way, they reflect true museum memories and our real feelings about those memories. They reveal what we care about, what really matters. Too much of our distracted professional lives is preoccupied with concerns that may not be central to our true missions nor to why museums are important to us and to the society at large. So our stories are worth listening to. They have much to tell us about museums, how they work, and why they make a difference. (2000b, p. 1)

Spock did not focus on art museum educators in his study. The art museum educators in my dissertation all freely shared vivid early experiences with creating art during our conversations, even though I did not include this as an official topic in my interview questions. This suggests that revisiting memories of being affected by art creation in formal and informal settings can also provide important insight into art museum educators' beliefs regarding their work and offer inspiration. Museum educators' vibrant, positive early memories of a growing passion for art, museums, and

education should be examined in depth, as was done in this dissertation, as this can assist art museum educators in their work.

This return to our memories of sensory, stimulating, often emotionally charged, and spirited experiences with art and museums can help fulfill Hooley McLaughlin's (1998) plea for museum educators to recall the "roots of our business" (p. 12), which he feels is to stimulate passion in visitors. McLaughlin reminds us that museums are not only in the business of preserving memories—they make memories. According to him, and I whole-heartedly agree with his contention, a "visitor can come away renewed and changed for life. The exotic reaches of learning are made into reality in a museum" (p. 10). The museum educators in this study know this. They are passionate about this potential and typically have vivid memories of actively living it. By activating and analyzing these memories, we can return to the "roots of our business" (p. 12).

Emerging Leaders, Solidifying Identities

This need to examine our roots is particularly essential at this important phase in museum education's history, as expressed by the participants in this study. The museum educators' narratives of professional experiences showcased the escalating demands being placed on them and their increasing leadership roles. Their narratives highlighted the increasing recognition of their specialty: how to activate meaningful learning experiences in museums. They spoke of their increasing responsibilities and their developing voices as learning and audience experts in collaborative endeavors with curators and directors. Although these exciting changes were welcomed, their personal stories also included some challenges that need to be addressed—hefty workloads, issues with distribution of power, and competing visions for education.

As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Tina R. Nolan (2009a) spoke of the fact that many museum educators feel “undervalued, unclear of where they fit within the larger museum context” (p. 118) and overwhelmed during this time of increased focus on museum education. She noted that education has become increasingly central to the workings of museums. Although this is obviously positive, the major problem is that, in many cases, all staff members feel they are “educators” in a sense. Even though the expertise of museum educators is called upon, it seems to be undermined in real-life situations—the extreme situation being the frequent cuts to education departments before others. Graeme Talboys (2005) has referred to the strange predicament that many museum educators find themselves in at this time:

...many a museum educator, even in the most enlightened of museums, will find themselves in a curious situation. They work for a museum but are not quite seen as museum professionals; they deal with the concerns of various educational user groups but are not quite seen as education professionals. A role that fulfills two functions and faces in two directions at once can be extremely difficult to cope with. (p. 20)

Erin Dragotto, Christine Minerva, and Michelle Nichols (2006) believe that if this situation is to improve, museums have to be aware of the specialized competencies associated with museum education work and the need for individuals with the necessary education and skills to hold these positions: “To continue to do our jobs well, our institutions need to recognize that museum education requires special skills and special people” (p. 221). It is my contention that this will more readily occur when Tina Nolan’s pleas are answered, namely for a common language in the museum education profession, a “consistent set of practices” (2009a, p. 118), and more leaders in the field in order to “reposition museum educators from the margins of our institutions to the center” (p. 119).

It is Nolan's contention that new educational leaders need to pave the way for change through innovation and insight, and the time to do this is now:

It is in *this* moment in our history that museum educators can help to reshape not only their profession, but also the future of the relationship between the public and its cultural institutions. Museum educators can and should play a critical role in shaping the future of museums in America, but they will require leaders who understand their role as change agents. These new educational leaders must pioneer new practices, advocate in new ways for their staffs, and come together to articulate a new role and consistent identity for the museum educators they serve. (p. 120)

Nolan believes this will require museum education leaders to help the profession carve out a clearer identity for itself. Engaging in reflective practices is essential to this quest (Nolan, 2009b). Likewise, Pat Villeneuve (2007) has called for museum educators to actively engage in reflective practices to create positive change in our profession: "...I am convinced we can advance our position in the museum by demonstrating an informed, deliberate, reflective practice" (p. 1). We need to take a step back and examine our core values and create a contextual picture of our profession, as I have begun to do in this dissertation. In this way, our voices will become stronger, more precise, and more authentically and readily heard.

The museum educators in this study all affirmed that their involvement in this life history project gave them a fruitful opportunity to take this step back from their daily work, reflect on their past experiences, and imagine how this reflection could inform their future practices—essentially, the work enabled them to reflect on their identities as museum educators from a holistic perspective. At its core, life history research reflectively examines identities (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Researchers and participants explore their identities through narrative. This process naturally assists participants in solidifying and strengthening their identities. When used in the field of museum

education, life history research can help with the fulfillment of Tina Nolan's plea—to better define museum educators' identities as leaders (2009b).

Learning Communities

Examining individual museum educators' identities through narrative is certainly a step in the right direction. But voicing these stories within the larger community is undeniably more powerful and is particularly necessary during this time of change in museums. The museum educators in this study emphasized the importance of engaging in learning communities related to their work. They shared a common willingness to support a collaborative environment in their institutions, where the narratives and visions of all workers can be expressed and valued. Time and again, researchers highlight the development of institution-wide collaborative learning communities as the way of the future for museums. Williams (2007) referred to the importance of interdepartmental collaboration at this important time for the museum world:

The responsibility of educating the public in museums now requires the combined efforts of not only museum educators, but also collections curators, exhibition designers, museum administrators, and trustees. The goal of this interdepartmental effort is intended to fuse scholarship with interpretation, while cultivating lifelong learning opportunities for diverse audiences.

Likewise, Willumson (2007) described how collaboration in the museum naturally encourages a more effective institution, able to reach out to a wider audience:

I believe that museum education's new status offers opportunities for museum educators to work with their curatorial colleagues to shape art museum practice so that curators can share their knowledge with the enlarged audiences of the 21st century and educators can find new opportunities to engage museum visitors with the resources provided by curatorial expertise. (p. 89)

Collaboration has become an important ideal in museums for these reasons, and the museum educators in this dissertation recognize and fervently endorse this. However,

the voices of museum educators can be muffled in these collaborative endeavors, as hierarchical power structures that position the voices of directors and curators as primary have been in place in museums for a very long time. Reeve (2006) referred to the unfortunate hierarchical structure that is often present:

At the root of the problem usually is the power structure of the museum or gallery. The real acid test is where the head of learning and access sits in the hierarchy and how involved they are in making decisions. Interpretation is too often seen as primarily, even exclusively, the responsibility of curators working with a design or presentation department. (p. 185)

Tina Nolan (2009b) reminds us of the power that museum educators can have, and the need for them to establish stronger voices in their institutions. She calls upon leaders to help these professionals realize and employ their power by amplifying their voices in their institutions: “Good leaders can help them to realize the power that they have, marshal their collective expertise, give them a voice and shape their new role as critical stakeholders in the museum” (p. 181). Museum educators’ voices need to become strengthened in collaborative endeavors with colleagues so effective learning communities can evolve.

The participants articulated how this life history project offered them an opportunity to voice their identities and contribute their stories to discourses relating to art museums. This work enabled these often hidden narratives to surface, shine, and become present in museum research, and possibly within their institutions, though this would need to be examined in a future study. When discussing life study research methods in examinations of schoolteachers, Goodson (2000) emphasized the importance of such methods in developing a strengthened voice for teachers:

In one sense the project of “studying the teacher’s life and work” represents an attempt to generate a counter-culture that will resist the tendency to return

teachers to the shadows; a counter-culture based upon a research mode that above all places teachers at the center of the action and seeks to sponsor “the teacher’s voice.” (p. 16)

Goodson (1991) called for researchers to reconceptualize educational research to ensure the “teacher’s voice is heard, heard loudly, heard articulately” (p. 36). As examined earlier in this dissertation, Goodson (2000) contended that “the way we study teachers reflects the value we put on them” (p. 14). From the response of the museum educators in this dissertation, engagement in life history research can help them to feel that their voices are being heard in museum education literature. This in turn could assist them in their quest to have their voices heard in this way within their interdepartmental and external collaborations.

Implications for Pre-Service Education Programs

Recently there have been great changes in the roles of and demands on art museum educators, as discussed throughout this dissertation. Naturally, this requires changes in the professional preparation of these educators. A number of publications over the past few decades have examined the pre-service education of museum educators, demonstrating the need to examine this issue (Brigham et al., 1988; Chen, 2004; Chen Cooper, 2007; Ebitz, 2007, 2008; El-Omami, 1989; Jensen & Munley, 1985; Pond, 1988). Despite the numerous studies, there is no clear consensus on what the ideal pre-service preparation for a museum educator is. Brigham et al. (1988) feel that the diversity of museum educators’ backgrounds “gives our field strength and richness” (p. 8). I would certainly agree with this; however, envisioning an ideal professional preparation trajectory can assist in developing strong museum educators and, consequently, greater

recognition of museum education as a true profession in the eyes of other museum workers and society in general.

As the participants in this study pointed out, art and education were central to their postsecondary studies and the knowledge gained in these degree programs is essential to their work. They also noted that an education that examines how to apply theories associated with these areas to museum education is imperative. As explored in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Dobbs and Eisner (1987) called for a strengthening of the profession of museum education. They stressed the importance of education in learning theory and art history, the former of which is often pushed aside. Chen Cooper (2007) found that museums are paying more attention to those who have degrees in museum education, arts education, and education, rather than solely bachelor's degrees in art history. She noted that this suggests that "art museum education is increasingly becoming a profession of its own" (p. 72).

The museum educators in this study spoke of an imagined future museum education preparation program. A degree that emphasizes educational theory, studio arts, art history, and applications for the museum setting would be ideal. At present, most museum studies programs focus on curatorial endeavors and criticism and only touch on educational theory, museum education theory, and studio arts.

Based on the findings from this research, pre-service art museum programs also need to include substantial practicum components. Participants emphasized that internships offer opportunities for theory and practice to meet in meaningful ways. The participants noted that significant study of theories and case studies is necessary in the preparation of museum educators but certainly not sufficient. The realities associated

with the daily work of museum educators need to be explored in pre-service programs.

The knowledge gained from university courses is essential, but opportunities to apply theory are equally important. Arner and Lanza-Kaduce (2012) recently elaborated on this point:

A post-secondary education may be essential for being a “marketable” employee but it does not replace the life lessons and skills gained through on-the-job experience. Internship programs can help alleviate this disparity by providing an opportunity for students to gain practical work experience while they are still in school. (p. 34)

Furthermore, these authors note how important internships are in teaching students the “soft skills” needed in their domain:

Many employers rate a deficiency in soft skills as the number one issue with new employees. In many cases, students are not even aware that these abilities need honing or that they can be just as important as technical training. While post-secondary education provides students with technical knowledge, internship programs provide them the foreground for vital immersion training in soft skills. (p. 40)

This is especially true for museum education, as teaching is a very unpredictable and vibrant activity, requiring substantial soft skills, which is why teacher certification programs spend so much time on internships. The museum is a very particular informal learning environment. Students of museum education need hands-on experience teaching in these settings if they are to be prepared for a future in the field.

Collaboration was described as being of the utmost importance in these educators’ daily work. An education that explores strategies for effective collaborative endeavors would assist pre-service museum educators in their future interdepartmental collaborations. I would suggest that such education should also be mandatory for pre-service curators, directors, and administrators. Woollard (2006) noted that for cross-departmental collaboration to work: “Everyone will have to recognize that they will need

to unlearn certain ideologies and practices, restructure systems and strategies and reach new standards” (p. 220). In discussing the importance of internal collaboration, Willumson (2007) emphasized that: “Too often, administrators expect collaboration to take place automatically as part of the daily activity of the museum” (p. 93). Establishing a collaborative ideology and investigating strategies for collaboration during the pre-service education of museum professionals will help these practitioners from the outset.

Additionally, opportunities for museum educators to communicate with other pre-service museum workers should be an important component of pre-service educational programs. In 1985, museum educators at a colloquium in Detroit that focused on the profession discussed how important this opportunity would be in the professional development of museum professionals:

It was recommended that training programs be structured to encourage interaction among students studying for all areas of museum work. Future directors, curators, registrars, and educators need to talk with each other. This early introduction to varying perspectives on museum work could lead to better communication and increased sensitivity on the job. (Pond, 1988, p. 14)

I believe that opportunities to collaborate with future colleagues would further increase chances for more effective communication and empathy within museum educators’ careers. Through this, their expertise as public engagers will play a more prominent role in collaborations, bettering the chances for museums to fulfill their goals to be public-oriented institutions.

Implications for In-Service Professional Development

As pointed out throughout this dissertation, there have been massive changes in museums over the past thirty years. The essence of these changes has been a shift in thinking about the purpose of museums—from elitist repositories to engaging public

venues that cater to diverse audiences. These changes are aligned with the growing demand on museums to demonstrate their public value (Munley & Roberts, 2006). As Munley and Roberts have noted: “Museum educators are best positioned to lead their institutions in defining, achieving, and documenting their public value” (2006, p. 36). It is wonderful that museum educators are finally receiving recognition and being asked to assume more responsibilities in their institutions. However, it is necessary for these professionals to explore their personal and professional identities so they will be better prepared to successfully generate positive change in their institutions. They need to better understand themselves—their motivations, their beliefs, their practices, and their future goals. As explored in previous sections, Tina Nolan (2009a, 2009b) strongly believes that museum educators need to explore their identities at this time of great change and uncertainty in the profession. They need clearer, stronger voices in the museum world and in their particular institutions. Woollard (2006) emphasized the point: “When considering the professionalization of museum education practitioners, one needs to define the group” (p. 212). It is my contention that reflective, narrative-based practices can offer real insight into museum educators’ identities and should be incorporated into in-service professional development measures.

The educators in this study said that it can seem impossible to engage in such reflective practices given the extraordinarily busy schedules of museum educators. But, if these practices are valued and incorporated into the fabric of professional development, great positive change can occur in this profession. Museum educator instructors can turn to developments in in-service schoolteacher professional development practices that employ autobiographical and other forms of narrative work to assist them in this effort.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) cite the potential benefits for teachers engaging in in-service education that employs life history practices. These include improved self-knowledge; space and time to reflect; a chance to learn about educational institutions, education, and theory through the diversity of lived experiences; and the “therapeutic and cathartic benefits in times of crisis” (p. 74). These are clearly just as applicable to art museum educators, especially at this time.

Through these efforts, museum educators can develop a deeper understanding of their identities, which will assist them in strengthening their voices in their institutions. Sharing their rich narrative experiences with fellow museum educators within and outside of their institutions will do wonders to develop their collective voice—making it more articulate and louder. The museum educators who participated in this dissertation project referred to the importance of engaging in conversations with fellow museum educators in a variety of situations, and the need for more of this in their current jobs. Educators need time to discuss their narratives with their colleagues within their institutions but also in conferences settings and with visiting experts. More institutional support for museum educators to participate in professional development workshops and conferences where they can share their narratives and hear the narratives of others is needed. This will ultimately strengthen the collective identities and voices of these professionals.

Additionally, many of the participants referred to the importance of reading the relevant literature. Museums need to give museum educators the time and space to review new literature and to contribute to the discourse by submitting articles for publication. Institutions need to support these endeavors so museum educators can develop a shared voice, become more of a “true” profession in the eyes of those in positions of greater

power, and thus enact greater positive change in their institutions. Nolan (2009b)

elucidated on this:

Start by drawing on and adding to the newly emerging literature on the practice and pedagogy of museum educators...obtaining a more complete understanding of the museum educator's practice will aid in the creation of a shared language across institution type, which will lead to less fragmented discourse across the field and toward more public recognition of the field as a profession. (p. 179)

This strengthening of museum educators' identities and voices will better prepare them to assume more visible roles within their institutions, pulling them from the margins of museums' infrastructures to the center. This will be particularly important in interdepartmental collaborations. Many of the museum educators in this study referred to the challenges that they had encountered when attempting interdepartmental collaborations, which have become more common in recent years. Some participants said that their progressive visions had been pushed aside by more traditional ways of thinking. By solidifying a strong individual voice through narrative-based identity research and the development of a collective professional voice, their visions can become more clearly present in collaborative endeavors.

However, I think that more needs to be done to improve collaborative endeavors and dismantle hierarchical structures. One essential practice is to explore collaborative methods, such as Etienne Wenger's (1998) extensive work on *communities of practice*, which would encourage all museum workers to become involved in developing and implementing curatorial and educational programming. Since museums are aiming to become public-centered educational institutions for a variety of reasons, everyone involved in museums' workings needs to authentically believe this. This notion cannot be a foreign ideal in the institution; it needs to be a central reality. Visions regarding the role

of education in museums need to be cohesive across the institution. Nolan (2009b) emphasized the importance of a shared vision across the museum:

The keys to a successful learning organization are that the learning is centered on a shared vision, there are shared definitions of the work, and the work is tied directly to a larger moral purpose. (p. 178)

Senior management groups need to incorporate museum educators so this can effectively be achieved. Woollard elaborated on this:

Museums need to become more strategic in their medium- to long-term thinking as to how the whole organization is involved in working towards the needs of the visitors, rather than simply employing more frontline staff. To achieve this it is suggested that museum educators are integrated into the senior management teams and that learning is confirmed as central to the main aims and purposes of the museum. (2006, p. 218)

Curators, marketers, directors, administrators, and all other museum staff need to be ready to engage in this paradigmatic shift and to transfer some of their authority and power to museum educators in this effort.

Finally, the museum educators in this study referred to the importance of working directly with the public and the danger of spending all of one's time behind the scenes. Many of them stressed the importance of dedicating time to guiding learning experiences for the public rather than solely developing these experiences in theory. The opportunity to engage visitors in meaningful learning experiences is typically what attracts museum educators to the profession. At this time when great demands are being placed on museum educators, and when claims of being overwhelmed are not uncommon, it is important for all educators to have opportunities to connect with the essence of what it is they are aiming to do—engage a variety of publics in personally meaningful and engaging experiences. Brigham et al. (1988) shared their insight on this matter: “Those who move into administrative roles must find ways to communicate the value of

teaching, perhaps by continuing to teach on a limited basis and encouraging colleagues to become master teachers” (p. 9). Museum educators who have taken behind-the-scenes roles should have periodic opportunities to assume on-the-floor roles as well and sufficient occasions to listen to the narrative experiences of front-line staff members who are implementing their programs.

Future Research

As this is the first time that an extensive study has focused on the life histories of art museum educators, many areas for future research came to my attention throughout the study. For example, I was aiming to work with museum educators from a variety of institutions to gather insight into the realities of being a museum educator in a number of contemporary situations. This study did achieve this, as the rich stories of these educators revealed significant knowledge regarding their work in these various locations and why they chose to join these particular institutions. At the same time, there were such divergences in their realities, because of the radical differences in their institutions’ missions, that links between their professional experiences were difficult to pinpoint at times. Lemelin (2002) explained that “the objectives of museum educators and the latitude they have for exercising their functions also vary considerably among museums” (p. 1). For example, Emma’s reality as an educator in a small artist-run center that has little to no hierarchical structure is clearly divergent from Robert’s experiences in a large museum that is now trying to increase collaboration amongst its multitude of workers. It would be beneficial to explore the life histories of museum educators working in the same institution and to develop a platform for these educators to share and engage with each other’s stories throughout the study. In this way, we could begin to better understand

how museum education departments function and the histories of their workers. This could also provide opportunities for museum educators to open up dialogues with their educator colleagues and discover links in their histories, and consequently, their attitudes, beliefs, and visions for museum education.

In the previous section, I referred to the importance of infusing reflective narrative practices into the professional development of museum educators. As Nolan (2009a) pointed out, museum educators are often left to do more with less during this time of change. Time for in-depth narrative examinations, such as the one conducted in this study, is impossible to achieve during the normal work-time of museum practitioners. How can the methodology explored in this research be transformed into a set of guidelines for self-reflective practices that museum educators could employ in their daily work? In other words, how can museum educators use the methods explored in this project to become active reflective researchers on a regular basis? How can such practices be used to give them the space for self-study so they can become more effective practitioners? The myriad of techniques offered by Heewon Chang (2008) in her book *Autoethnography as Method* could be useful in such an examination.

This research raises questions about the life histories of curators, and museum directors, who typically come from a curatorial background. Some of the educators in this study referred to divergences between their own visions for education and curatorial endeavors and those of their curator colleagues. Why do there tend to be such differences in the epistemologies of these museum professionals? A life history investigation into museum curators' identities could help to answer this question. Additional questions that come to mind are: What are the links between curators' personal experiences as museum

visitors, creators of art, and students of art, and their professional experiences as curators in museums? What might their narratives say about the contemporary identities of art museum curators? What are the links and divergences between the life histories of curators and those of the educators they work with? And, most importantly, how can these findings assist in developing effective collaborative relationships between museum educators and curators?

Arts-informed research is a perfect methodology to accompany life history research. As Cole and Knowles (2001) stressed, by creating artistic representations of data, life history researchers can represent the aesthetic nature of lived experience in potentially more “authentic and meaningful ways” (p. 104). At the outset of this dissertation, I planned to incorporate arts-informed research into the data interpretation and representation processes of this study. The life history interviews left me with so much rich data that it was not possible to explore arts-informed research within this dissertation. Instead, I will be investigating the potential uses of arts-informed research in the interpretation of museum educators’ life histories in my future research program. As well, I will be researching how arts-informed research can be employed in the professional development of art museum educators. All of the participants in this study come from a background of art creation, and several of them referred to their current art practices. They are familiar with artistic creation as a form of expression and exploration. It is my belief that artistic forms of research could be used in the professional development of art museum educators. This research into the potential use of artistic forms of research as a catalyst and partner in museum educators’ self-studies will help identify the benefits of and best practices related to employing such innovative forms of

inquiry in the professional development of these practitioners. It is my belief that this may lead to educational inquiries that employ *arts-based* methodologies with museum educators in their professional development. Such studies could use arts-based research “as methodologies in their own right, not as extensions of qualitative research” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 898). If aesthetic forms of research are employed in the education and development of museum educators, these practitioners will be afforded opportunities to tap into their artistic knowing to investigate inquiries related to their work as educators.

Since this was the first study to examine museum professionals in this way, the question was relatively broad: what are the contemporary identities of art museum educators? A future study could examine more specific and pressing issues in art museum education. A critical issue that has run throughout this thesis has been the need to reach out to more diverse audiences and engage them in personally meaningful experiences in museums. This is also a primary issue in museum education literature. Recently, there have been an increasing number of significant studies and anthologies focused on the social responsibilities of museums and their roles in cultural discourses (e.g., Crooke, 2008; Golding, 2010; Janes & Conaty, 2005; Sandell, 2007; Silverman, 2010; Watson, 2007). Life history research into the stories of museum educators who are engaging in best practices in inclusive and multicultural museum education would be timely. My upcoming research program will examine this. The research will investigate the following questions: What are the personal experiences of these educators that have led them on this path? What are the connections between their personal experiences with inclusion and exclusion and their professional experiences as museum educators who work with a

strongly inclusive mindset and critically engaged multicultural approaches? What are the conditions enabling these educators to generate successful critical multicultural educational programming? How can the stories of art museum educators offer counter-narratives to dominant discourses relating to multiculturalism in art museums? How can life history practices be employed in studying pressing issues in art museums? Examining successful critical approaches to multicultural educational programming in art museums through the narrative experiences of museum educators will provide rich insight into how these public institutions can become more engaged, contextual, and responsive locations.

Conclusions

As explored throughout this study, art museums are aiming to engage more diverse audiences in personally meaningful learning experiences. They are naturally turning to museum educators in this effort, as these practitioners are viewed as the bridge between museums and their publics. This is because they are experts in methods for engaging diverse audiences in meaningful learning within these settings. As we have seen, there are great challenges associated with this transition. Many museum educators are left with an incredible amount of work, some colleagues still do not appreciate or even understand what their roles are, many museum educators are confused about their roles within collaborative endeavors, and because of the lack of consistency in the development of museum educators, there has been insufficient clarity across the field. All of this leads to the need for examinations into the identities of museum educators during this time of great change.

Very few studies have examined the roles of museum educators and their professional development histories. Most of these studies have focused on statistical

information and very limited first-person accounts. This dissertation offered an in-depth examination into the identities of museum educators through their own words. Their identities were explored through life history research, enabling a holistic account of these practitioners' lives as art creators, art museum visitors, and art museum educators. The themes that were revealed in these histories are in line with many of the ideas found in museum education literature and shed light on those notions. The knowledge developed holds great implications for the pre-service education and the in-service professional development of these practitioners.

Since this is the first study of its kind, these five life histories are the only in-depth narrative-based compilations of museum educators' professional and personal experiences at this time. More studies of this nature need to be conducted to develop an ongoing dialogue and provide a more holistic understanding of the profession. Arts-informed practices could be incorporated into these life history research projects, as they can strengthen such work. These studies could examine more specific pressing issues in the field, such as inclusive and critical approaches to multicultural art education in the museum. More focused studies of individual institutions could help provide insight into specific kinds of art museums and their particular education departments. Furthermore, this work could be expanded into other museum education professions, such as curatorial domains. This could assist museum educators and their colleagues from other sectors in better understanding each other and could potentially improve collaborative initiatives.

The participants in this study revealed the importance of postsecondary experience with studio art, art history, and educational theory—particularly in relation to the learning environment of the art museum—in the preparation of art museum educators.

They also stressed the value of internship opportunities in pre-service education, as internships give students an opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience in linking theory and practice and to develop the soft skills needed for this profession. Museum educator preparation programs could become more consistent in offering in-depth work in these subject areas and in ensuring that substantial practicum experience is incorporated into these programs. In-service professional development programs could incorporate life history and other self-reflective narrative methods to allow greater self-understanding to evolve and clearer identities to be formed. Through such changes, art museum educators' voices can become stronger and clearer, and these practitioners can be better positioned to take leadership roles in their institutions.

The art museum educators interviewed in this study have led lives filled with art. Their rich stories reveal passionate and emotional attitudes to art, art museums, and art education. Stepping back from their daily work to examine the origins of these passions and the makeup of their identities as dedicated artists, museum visitors, and museum professionals can strengthen these passions and help inform future practices. Returning to these roots is essential during these times of change. Museum educators' narratives need to be amplified and their identities need to be strengthened so that they can better achieve their task of facilitating positive and meaningful experiences for diverse museum publics. I implore museum educators to reflect on their narratives, share these narratives, and listen to the narratives of colleagues. These rich stories are worth sharing, listening to, and amplifying.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in the Research

Date

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the contemporary reality of art museum educators. This email will provide you with details associated with your participation in the project.

If you choose to participate, you will be involved in two conversations with me, each of which will last approximately one hour. The conversations will ask you to reflect on your personal and professional experiences. You will receive a list of the guiding questions in advance. Furthermore, you will be requested to complete a biographical data form outlining your professional and educational experience, along with your expectations for this research. You will also be asked to develop a timeline of your experiences leading to your current position. The histories of five other museum educators will also be examined in the same fashion. The resulting data will contribute to a vision of the contemporary reality of museum educators. I also am interested in understanding the potential place for such research in museum educator development.

In order to participate in this project, you need to be working or have recently worked in an art museum, art gallery or artist-run center as an educator. The meetings will be conducted between January and August of 2010.

I thank you for considering to participate in this project. I value your enthusiasm and the time and energy you are considering to contribute to this study. If you decide to participate, please contact me by phone or by email and I will send you a consent form that further outlines this study and your involvement. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Natasha Reid

Department of Art Education
Concordia University

Appendix B

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT TITLED:

The contemporary reality of art museum educators as seen through their life histories

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by;

Dr. Paul Langdon
Principal Investigator/Thesis Supervisor
Department of Art Education of Concordia University
plangdon@alcor.concordia.ca
514-848-2424 ext. 4645

Natasha Reid
Co-investigator/Doctoral Student
Department of Art Education of Concordia University
natashasreid@yahoo.ca
514-274-2164

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is as follows:

This research project will investigate the contemporary reality of museum educators by exploring their personal and professional museum-related experiences. This project aims to develop an understanding of the museum education profession through the narratives of museum educators themselves and to pilot the usefulness of such examinations in professional training efforts.

B. PROCEDURES

The participants will be requested to fill out a biographical data form that outlines their professional and educational experiences along with your expectations for the project. This form should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Each participant will meet with Natasha Reid for two meetings of approximately one hour each, held between January 2010 and August 2010. Between these two meetings, participants will be asked to create a more detailed timeline of their professional and education-related experiences. This exercise will take approximately half an hour. The conversations that develop during the two meetings will be audio recorded and transcribed by Natasha. The data will be stored in Natasha's locked home office on her computer and two external hard-drives that will be password protected. Participants will receive a copy of the transcriptions of the conversations and will have two weeks to review the transcripts and to make any desired changes to the text. If the participant needs more time to review the transcripts, an

alternative deadline will be discussed. Once the thesis has been defended, each participant will receive a digital copy of the dissertation document.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

By participating in this project participants will have a chance to reflect on the connections between their personal and professional practice along with their contemporary reality as museum educators. Furthermore, they will be contributing to an understanding of today's museum education profession and to future training guidelines for museum educators. There are minimal risks associated with this project. Participants are not obliged to answer the questions. Thus, they can choose to decline answering one or more questions during the recorded meetings and are able to pause the recording or can stop the meeting at any point.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is:
CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity)
- I understand that the data from this study may be published and/or used in presentations.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator:

Dr. Paul Langdon
Department of Art Education
plangdon@alcor.concordia.ca
514-848-2424 ext. 4645

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, Dr. Brigitte Des Rosiers, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at bdesrosi@alcor.concordia.ca

Appendix C

Biographical Data Form

Name:

Current place of employment:

How long have you been working at your current place of employment?

What is your current title?

What are the general duties associated with this position?

How many years have you worked in museums?

Please list your previous positions relating to museum education.

Which educational institutions have you attended? What degrees and/or diplomas have you worked on?

Briefly describe the professional development you have engaged in.

Have you ever participated in a research project relating to your work as a museum educator? If so, please describe.

What are your reasons for participating in this research project?

What are your expectations for this project? What are you hoping to receive from this process?

Appendix D

Guiding Topics

Guiding Topics for Interview No. 1

Focusing on the personal

1. Topic: *Positive early museum experiences*
Please share a pivotal early memory of a museum visit. What were the personal, social and physical contexts of this visit?
2. Topic: *Frequency of early museum experiences*
How often did you go to museums with your family and school? What details do you recall from these experiences?
3. Topic: *Recent positive museum experience*
Please describe a recent positive museum visit that you experienced. What did you value about the experience? How did this visit influence your own museum education philosophy and/or practice?
4. Topic: *Recent negative museum visits*
Describe a challenging museum visit. How do you attempt to avoid such experiences for yourself? How did this visit influence your own museum education philosophy and/or practice?
5. Topic: *Life mentors*
Who would you consider to be a mentor to you? How has this person influenced you? What characteristics do you value in this person? Share a story that demonstrates how this person shows these characteristics.
6. Topic: *Professional and related personal history* (linking to next interview)
Before our next meeting, please make a timeline of your professional and educational history, starting from as early as you can. You are encouraged to also include events in your personal life that have influenced your professional and educational history.

Guiding Themes for Interview No. 2

Focusing on the professional

1. Topic: *Personal and professional history*
What sequence of events brought you into the museum education profession and towards your current position?
2. Topic: *Highlights*
What are the highlights of your job? If possible, please share one or more stories that illustrate this.

3. Topic: *Challenges*
What are the challenges related to your job? If possible, please share one or more stories that illustrate this.
4. Topic: *Museum educator-museum visitor relationships*
What type of relationship do you try to develop with your visitors? Has this changed over the years? Share an experience that demonstrates this type of relationship.
5. Topic: *Relationships between museum educators*
How would you describe the relationship between fellow museum educators in your job? Please share a story that exemplifies this.
6. Topic: *Museum educator-museum curator relationships*
Describe an experience that illustrates the relationships between educators and curators and/or directors in your job.
7. Topic: *Curatorial design and museum education*
How do curatorial decisions affect you in your job? If possible share a memory that exemplifies this.
8. Topic: *Role of the museum educator*
What is your conception of the contemporary role of museum education in the museum world? If possible, please share an experience that illuminates this.
9. Topic: *Training*
In your opinion, what is necessary for effective professional training in museum education?
10. Topic: *Place for life history research in the museum education profession*
What is your reaction to this research process? How does it relate to your professional practice?